43524

National Library
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Canadian Theses Division

Division des thèses canadiennes

Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0N4

PERMISSION TO MICROFILM — AUTORISATION DE MICROFILMER

- Please print or type — Écrire en lettres moulées ou dactylographier

Full Name of Author — Nom complet de l'auteur

ROY ARNOLD PRETE

Date of Birth — Date de naissance

October 24, 1943

Country of Birth — Lieu de naissance

Canada

Permanent Address — Résidence fixe

244 Weller Ave.
Kingston, OnT
K7K 2V2

Title of Thesis — Titre de la thèse

The War of Movement on The Western Front, August - November, 1914: A Study in Coalition Warfare

University — Université

Alberta

Degree for which thesis was presented — Grade pour lequel cette thèse fut présentée

PhD

Year this degree conferred — Année d'obtention de ce grade

1979

Name of Supervisor — Nom du directeur de thèse

Dr. Ulrich Trumpener

Permission is hereby granted to the NATIONAL LIBRARY OF CANADA to microfilm this thesis and to lend or sell copies of the film.

The author reserves other publication rights, and neither the thesis nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's written permission.

L'autorisation est, par la présente, accordée à la BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DU CANADA de microfilmer cette thèse et de prêter ou de vendre des exemplaires du film.

L'auteur se réserve les autres droits de publication; ni la thèse ni de longs extraits de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans l'autorisation écrite de l'auteur.

Date

October 17, 1979

Signature

Roy A. Prete

NL-91 (4/77)

National Library of Canada

Cataloguing Branch
Canadian Theses Division

Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0N4

Bibliothèque nationale du Canada

Direction du catalogage
Division des thèses canadiennes

NOTICE

The quality of this microfiche is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us a poor photocopy.

Previously copyrighted materials (journal articles, published tests, etc.) are not filmed.

Reproduction in full or in part of this film is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30. Please read the authorization forms which accompany this thesis.

THIS DISSERTATION
HAS BEEN MICROFILMED
EXACTLY AS RECEIVED

AVIS

La qualité de cette microfiche dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de mauvaise qualité.

Les documents qui font déjà l'objet d'un droit d'auteur (articles de revue, examens publiés, etc.) ne sont pas microfilmés.

La reproduction, même partielle, de ce microfilm est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30. Veuillez prendre connaissance des formules d'autorisation qui accompagnent cette thèse.

LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ
MICROFILMÉE TELLE QUE
NOUS L'AVONS REÇUE

NL-339 (3/77)

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE WAR OF MOVEMENT ON THE WESTERN FRONT, AUGUST - NOVEMBER, 1914: A STUDY IN COALITION WARFARE

by

Ⓒ ROY A. PRETE

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL, 1979

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled

THE WAR OF MOVEMENT ON THE WESTERN FRONT,
AUGUST - NOVEMBER, 1914:
A STUDY IN COALITION WARFARE

submitted by Roy A. Prete

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History

Ulrich Trumpener
Supervisor

P. E. Prestwich

R. R. Gilsdorf

John Cairns
External Examiner

Date October 12, 1979

To Carma

ABSTRACT

The subject of this thesis is the operation of the Anglo-French coalition during the phase of movement on the western front from August to November, 1914. Although Anglo-French relations during the Battle of the Marne have been treated in several studies, no study exists of the entire period of manoeuvre of mass armies in the open field prior to the advent of trench warfare in mid-November. That whole period nonetheless offers a special interest because of the interaction of policy, strategy and tactics on a front of more vital interest to the French than the British.

A central theme of the study is that Joffre, the French Commander-in-Chief, sought to obtain a maximum contribution from the British on the battlefield in 1914 as a means of defending the vital interests of France. Although the British entered the war with a limited commitment to continental defence, Kitchener, the British Secretary of State for War, acceded to Joffre's ever-increasing demands in the belief that British interest, even survival, depended on Anglo-French victory over Germany on the continent. Thus, while preparing mass armies for ultimate British triumph, he intervened when necessary to force cooperation; in particular by his trip to Paris on September 1, when the Alliance threatened to dissolve; and as crisis followed crisis, he extended Britain's continental commitment. Thus, on November 1, in response to the crisis during the Battle of Ypres, he promised the French a million men on the western front for the summer of 1915.

As former enemies, the French and British were to prove uneasy Allies in 1914. Conflict in particular arose in early October when Kitchener's plan for an expedition for the relief of Antwerp clashed with Joffre's strategy of a flanking manoeuvre in northern France against the German Army. Even after the victory of the Marne, much mistrust and suspicion prevailed between the two commands, serving as the chief impediment between them to effective cooperation. A prolonged command crisis thus developed in late October when the Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force, Sir John French, redeployed his Force in Flanders from the Aisne, despite French misgivings, and then failed to march on Lille. Indeed, Sir John, whose command was independent of the French, was not always agreeable to the French formula of maximum British participation under French direction. The degree of success on the battlefield, which depended on French strategic planning, nevertheless, affected the functioning of the coalition most of all, for cooperation could be built only on confidence. In the final analysis, the French and British were only partially compatible as Allies, and their cooperation during the "War of Movement" must be qualified as a limited success.

At the end of the period, the pattern of Allied cooperation had been established for the long period of stalemate which followed on the western front. The thesis is based mainly on research in archival sources and the private papers and diaries of the main participants in France and Great Britain.

PREFACE

As late as 1898 when Kitchener confronted Marchand at Fashoda, a prophet who would have ventured to predict that in just sixteen years Great Britain and France would be Allies on the field of battle would undoubtedly have seemed mad. That the French and British, after 600 years of bitter rivalry, should combine in a wartime coalition to thwart the German quest for hegemony on the continent was indeed a significant development. Naturally, the Anglo-French coalition encountered difficulties; it is surprising that it functioned at all.

The subject of this thesis is the operation of the Anglo-French coalition during the phase of movement on the western front from August to November, 1914. During that period the destiny of the western world hung on the manoeuvre of armies in the field and the first great battles until the short war of movement universally anticipated deteriorated into stalemate and the horrible carnage of trench warfare. The Anglo-French experience during this initial clash of arms is illustrative of many of the commonplaces and yet, at the same time, some of the less appreciated aspects of the theory and practice of coalition warfare. Inasmuch as the operation of coalitions has had a significant impact on the evolution of European society, and important shapers of opinion and policy continue to regard coalitions as the essential basis of national security, the study of coalition warfare, even on a microcosmic level, appears entirely justifiable.

Unlike the European wars for continental hegemony of earlier centuries, or even the Second World War for that matter, the First World War has scarcely been treated from the point of view of the operation of military coalitions on land. David F. Trask, it is true, has traced the role of The United States in the Supreme War Council (1961), and Gerard E. Silberstein has done a careful study of the German-Austrian military coalition through 1916 in his Troubled Alliance (1970). But, apart from Sir Frederick Maurice's brief volume, Lessons of Allied Co-operation, Naval, Military and Air, 1914-1918, produced for official British use in 1942, no comprehensive coverage exists of the entire subject of Allied military cooperation during the First World War. French leadership of the military coalition prior to the advent of Foch as Allied Commander-in-Chief in March, 1918, has been particularly neglected in scholarly literature.

To fill this enormous gap from research in archival materials is obviously a task beyond the scope of this thesis. But it is hoped that a modest beginning may be made by an analysis of the political and military aspects of Anglo-French cooperation during the decisive months of 1914 which led to a stalemate on the western front. The period in fact offers a broader unity than that suggested by works such as John Terraine's Mons: Retreat to Victory (1960) or E. L. Spears' Liaison, 1914 (1931), which neglect treatment of the so-called "Race to the Sea." The entire period of large scale manoeuvre of mass armies on the open field, not repeated until the German breakthrough in the spring of 1918, is especially interesting for the interaction of policy, strategy and tactics on a front of more vital interest to one of the partners than the other.

In a study of this kind, the basic nature of coalitions must always be kept in mind.[1] Coalitions, obviously, are based on political expediency and necessity, and come into being only when the interests of two or more states may be served by some form of cooperation. Old rivalries may be temporarily abandoned in the face of a new and more pressing danger. But, of course, joint pursuit of common interests is a purely temporary adaptation of the basic concept of self-interest. Moreover, should an alliance be transformed into a political and military coalition by the advent of war, the "continuation of state policy by other means," as Clausewitz described it, the common bond of the coalition remains those vital interests of each state which are best served by a combined response. The most powerful force which bound the French and British together in 1914, despite their long-term traditional rivalry, was the common enemy.

On the political level, the degree of commitment of each ally to a particular campaign is of vital importance. A central theme of this study is that Joffre, as French Commander-in-Chief, in line with French policy since the defeat of 1870-71, sought to obtain a maximum contribution from the Allies of France, and, in particular, from the British on the field of battle in 1914, as a means of defending the vital interests of France. At the same time, Kitchener, who wielded effective control of military policy in Great Britain, was prepared to accede to French demands, not because of any love for the French, but because he, more than many of his contemporaries, believed that vital British interest, even survival, depended on Anglo-French victory over Germany on the continent. While preparing mass armies for ultimate British triumph, he nevertheless acceded to the full extent of his means to Joffre's ever-increasing and always pressing demands, and intervened when necessary to force cooperation in the field. As crisis followed crisis, Kitchener thus extended Great Britain's continental commitment, even to the promise made to the French as early as November 1, 1914, of a million men on the western front for the summer of 1915.

---

[1] For a general theoretical treatment, see George Liska, Nations in Alliance: The Limits of Interdependence (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1962), pp. 3-157.

British strategy, however, which was concerned essentially with the maintenance of a suitable balance of power on the continent and the exclusion from the Channel coasts of any Major Power, was not always in harmony with the strategy of the French, which focused on winning decisive battles in the field. As in earlier coalitions, such as the military coalition against Napoleon in 1813-14, the war aims of the two partners came into conflict, especially over the defence of Antwerp at the beginning of October, 1914. British civil-military conflict, moreover, was exacerbated as in 1813-14 as British field strategy during the "War of Movement," closely following that of the French, clashed with Kitchener's strategy of creating mass armies for ultimate victory. And, of course, as in the coalition of 1813-14, unity of command was never achieved.[2]

On the military level, other factors had substantial impact on the functioning of the alliance. The political-military structures of the two states, the personnel and structure of the two commands and the personalities of the key figures had a significant impact on the operation of the coalition. Joffre, in fact, emerged out of these relationships as the master of Allied military strategy. His dominance remained a unique aspect of the Anglo-French coalition until his fall from power at the end of 1916. The relative size of each land force, the prewar staff arrangements and relations, and traditional stereotypes and prejudices had a very great impact on Allied command relations, moreover, as the French Command attempted to obtain maximum British participation in the field, but always, of course, under French leadership. But the degree of success on the battlefield, which in large part depended on French strategic planning and leadership, affected the functioning of the military alliance most of all, for cooperation could be built only on confidence.

---

[2] See Gordon Craig, Problems of Coalition Warfare: The Military Alliance against Napoleon, 1813-1814 (Colorado Springs, Colorado: United States Airforce Academy, 1965), pp. 1-2ff.

In the final analysis the relationship between two armies pursuing a joint goal on a common field of battle is not only a military but a social experience. A common tradition is therefore of much significance in a coalition. The fact that France's new friends were her old enemies thus had important implications. Despite a decade of good relations under the Entente Cordiale, deepseated distrust and suspicion persisted. They were the single greatest impediment to effective cooperation in the field. The British and French, as a result, were only partially compatible as Allies, and often found each other irritating and disagreeable, although not impossible to work with. Their cooperation must be viewed as a qualified, if somewhat disjointed, success during the "War of Movement."

The material for this analysis has been garnered essentially from archives in France and Great Britain. The French point of view has been examined from the French Archives de Guerre at Vincennes, the files of the French Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, and the private papers and diaries of various political and military figures. These include Millerand, the French War Minister (August 1914 - October 1915); Delcassé, Foreign Minister (August 1914 - October 1915); Poincaré, President of the Republic; Paul Cambon, French Ambassador at London; General Foch, Army Group Commander in a sector next to the British; and General Berthelot, Joffre's Assistant Chief of Staff during the Battle of the Marne and the "Race to the Sea." The Kitchener papers, the diaries of Brigadier-General Sir Henry Wilson (Sub-Chief of Staff to Field Marshal French), the diaries of Major G. S. Clive (Head of the British Mission to French Headquarters), and Asquith's letters to the King have been especially valuable in tracing the British point of view. The Bertie and Grey papers have also been useful, as have been numerous memoirs and secondary sources, including the official French and British histories of the war. Les Armées Françaises dans la Grande Guerre (105 vols.) has been particularly useful because of the generally reliable and almost integral reproduction (except for sensitive matters) of the French Military Archives for the early period of the war.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Several institutions and persons have greatly contributed to the realization of this venture. The French Government, in awarding a Bourse d'études supérieures, made research in France possible, and the University of Alberta provided continual financial support in the form of assistantships and awards over an extended period of time. The Royal Military College of Canada allowed completion of the project during full-time employment. The staffs of the Archives de Guerre, the Bibliothèque Nationale and the Archives Nationales in Paris, France, were unfailingly helpful. Colonel Henri Fournier-Foch was especially gracious in providing access to unpublished papers and a journal of his grandfather, Marshal Foch. Mr. Jean-Claude Dubois provided access to the unpublished manuscript of the very full diaries of his great uncle, General Berthelot. The Imperial War Museum, the Liddell Hart Military Archives at King's College, and the Public Record Office in London were most helpful in making available their holdings. Especially, acknowledgment is given to Major C. J. Wilson for the right to use and quote long sections from the colourful diary of his uncle, Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson.

Dr. Kenneth Taylor and Dr. Patricia Prestwich, members of the advisory committee, provided much helpful criticism and advice which has greatly assisted in the preparation of this study. Dr. Ulrich Trumpener, the committee chairman, deserves a special mention, not only for his meticulous scrutiny and criticism of the manuscript, but for his kindly advice, encouragement, and unstinted support. At the Royal Military College, Dr. Thomas Vincent of the Department of English proofread the manuscript, Dr. Ronald Haycock of the Department of History and Captain Valerie Spencer assisted in the translation of German sources, while Dr. Klaus Hansen of Queen's University criticized part of the thesis and provided helpful advice. Finally, I owe a very deep debt of gratitude to my wife, Carma, whose confidence, courage, and patience never failed, despite the trials of being married to a struggling and impecunious doctoral student. She also typed the manuscript.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF MAPS xvii

KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS xviii

Chapter Page

I. PREPARATION OF THE ANGLO-FRENCH COALITION, 1911-1914 . . . 1

II. POPULAR POLITICS, GOVERNMENTS AND HIGH COMMANDS, AUGUST-NOVEMBER, 1914 74

III. FROM ENTENTE TO WARTIME COALITION: FRENCH STRATEGIC RESPONSE TO BRITISH POLICY AND STRATEGY, AUGUST 1-21, 1914 109

IV. THE FAILURE OF FRENCH STRATEGY: CHARLEROI AND MONS, AUGUST 21-24, 1914 144

V. THE SECOND FAILURE OF FRENCH STRATEGIC PLANNING AND THE NEAR COLLAPSE OF ALLIED MILITARY COOPERATION: THE AISNE, AUGUST 25-30, 1914 180

VI. POLITICAL INTERVENTION AND THE RESTORATION OF STRATEGIC COOPERATION, AUGUST 31-SEPTEMBER 3, 1914 232

VII. COORDINATION IN THE FIELD AND THE PREPARATION OF THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE, SEPTEMBER 3-5, 1914 273

VIII. MARCHING: THE MARNE AND THE AISNE, SEPTEMBER 6-23, 1914 309

IX. ANTWERP AND THE MOVE NORTH: BRITISH STRATEGIC POLICY VERSUS FRENCH FIELD STRATEGY, SEPTEMBER 24-OCTOBER 10, 1914 333

X. THE MARCH ON LILLE AND THE REQUEST FOR SIR JOHN'S RECALL OCTOBER 5-23, 1914 391

XI. BATTLE, COMMITMENT AND COMMAND: THE BATTLE OF YPRES AND THE DUNKIRK CONFERENCE OF NOVEMBER 1, 1914 433

XII. EPILOGUE: THE END OF A PERIOD, NOVEMBER-DECEMBER, 1914 469

XIII. CONCLUSIONS 502

BIBLIOGRAPHY 519

LIST OF MAPS

Map		Page
1.	Plan XVII and Schlieffen Plan	57
2.	Situation on the Evening of August 23, Northern Frontier, According to French Intelligence	159
3.	The True Military Situation on the Eve of Mons, 22nd August, 1914	160
4.	The Eve of Le Cateau, 25th August, 1914	190
5.	Situation on the Evening of August 28, Eve of the Battle of Guise	205
6.	Situation on the Evening of September 1, 1914	247
7.	Situation on the Evening of September 5, Eve of the Battle of the Marne	298
8.	General Situation on the Evening of September 9, Beginning of the Retreat of the German Armies	320
9.	The Battle of the Aisne, 14th September, 1914	327
10.	The Race Towards the Sea, 15 September - 8 October	358
11.	Antwerp Operations, 19th Sept. - 15th Oct. 1914	377
12.	Situation Oct. 5, 1914	399
13.	Situation Oct. 12, 1914, when British Corps Entered Line	419
14.	Situation Oct. 17, 1914 on the Eve of the Battle of the Yser and Ypres	419
15.	The Battle of Gheluvelt, 29-30 October, and 31 October-5 November	444

KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

AE	Archives des Affaires Etrangères, Paris
AFF	Archives of Fournier-Foch, Paris
AFGG	*Les Armées Françaises dans la Grande Guerre*
AG	Archives de Guerre, Vincennes
AN	Archives Nationales, Paris
Cab	Cabinet Papers, Public Record Office, London
CT	Cipher Telegram
FO	Foreign Office, London
HGW	*History of the Great War Based on Official Documents*
IWM	Imperial War Museum, London
KCMA	King's College Military Archives, London
PRO	Public Record Office, London
T	Telegram
WO	War Office, London

CHAPTER I

PREPARATION OF THE ANGLO-FRENCH COALITION

1911-1914

With the British declaration of war against Germany on August 4, 1914, the Triple Entente, consisting of Great Britain, France and Russia, was transformed into a de facto military alliance against the Central Powers, Germany and Austria-Hungary. The reality of that alliance was confirmed a month later, on September 4, by a joint pledge not to make a separate peace.[1] Unlike the partners of the Dual Alliance, France and Russia, who were bonded by precise prewar pledges of mutual support, Great Britain owed no specific obligations to any member of the Triple Entente prior to the war. The lack of a precise British commitment ought not to obscure the realities of the situation, however, for the foreign and defence policies of Great Britain and France had gone a long ways toward forging an Anglo-French coalition well in advance of hostilities. The Anglo-French Entente Cordiale of 1904 had, in fact, been transformed by the two Moroccan crises and the growing threat of German naval power from a loose friendship into a quasi-alliance, lacking the vital pledge of mutual support, but bonded by common interest and capable of transformation at a moment's notice into a full-fledged military coalition.[2]

---

[1] See Viscount [Edward] Grey of Fallodon, Twenty-Five Years, 1892-1916 (2 vols.; New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1925), II, 161-64; cf. Raymond Poincaré, Au service de la France: Neuf années de souvenirs (10 vols.; Paris: Plon Nourrit, 1926-33), IV, 194, 211, 232-33, 252-53.

British Defence Policy and the Entente Cordiale, 1904-1911

The Anglo-French *Entente Cordiale* of 1904 owed its origin to the basic realignment of power in Europe which occurred shortly after the turn of the century. Relevant to that realignment and of even greater significance for the subsequent evolution of the *Entente Cordiale* was the perceived menace to the British Empire of growing German naval power following the decision of imperial Germany in 1899 to build a "risk navy."[3] That decision taken in support of a policy of "world power" seemed to be aimed directly at the British Empire, and, coupled with the decision by Japan and the United States to build strong navies, seriously undermined the efficacy of the "two-power" British naval standard upon which rested the proud nineteenth-century policy of splendid isolation. Faced with the outward hostility of all the Great Powers during the South African War, the British simply cut their naval liabilities diplomatically, first by an alliance with Japan in 1902, and then, in 1904, after failure to reach satisfactory terms of accommodation with Germany, by a diplomatic rapprochement with France, which, incidentally, also removed the danger of involvement by either party in the Russo-Japanese War on behalf of their Allies.[4]

---

[2] For a very good, comprehensive account of the political and military evolution of the *Entente Cordiale*, see Samuel R. Williamson, Jr., *The Politics of Grand Strategy: Britain and France Prepare for War, 1904-1914* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969).

[3] Cf. Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis*, Vol. I: *1911-1914* (3rd ed.; London: Thornton Butterworth Ltd., 1924), pp. 20-21.

[4] This is essentially the interpretation given by Michael Howard, *The Continental Commitment: The Dilemma of British Defence Policy in*

The Entente Cordiale, which consisted essentially of the settlement of outstanding colonial differences, was a diplomatic understanding, not an alliance. By giving Great Britain a free hand in Egypt and France a free hand in Morocco, the accord was of considerable significance in its own right in view of the fact that in 1898, just six years earlier, France and Great Britain had come to the brink of war over possession of the Upper Nile. But the French aim of shutting Germany out of Morocco and the promise of mutual diplomatic support symbolized the deeper meaning of the diplomatic rapprochement between France and Great Britain and suggested the possible lines of its future evolution as an instrument against Germany.[5]

The serious deficiencies of the British Army during the South African War also led to a thorough re-evaluation of traditional military institutions. Extensive reform resulted in a welter of new institutions: official confirmation of the Committee of Imperial Defence in 1902 to coordinate policy between the Army and Royal Navy under the watchful eye of the Cabinet; the adoption of an Army Council in 1904 to replace the powerful but unwieldly and chaotic administrative office of Commander-in-Chief; the creation of an Army General Staff in 1906, modelled on the German General Staff, to give the Army an effective "brain"; and finally, the Haldane Reforms of the Army itself, undertaken from 1906 onward to create an expeditionary striking force of six infantry

---

the Era of the Two World Wars (London: Temple Smith, 1972), pp. 9-30. For a fuller account, see George Monger, The End of Isolation: British Foreign Policy, 1900-1907 (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1963), pp. 1-186. Cf. Norman Gibbs, "British Strategic Doctrine, 1918-1939," in Michael Howard, ed., The Theory and Practice of War: Essays Presented to Captain B. H. Liddell Hart (London: Cassell, 1965), pp. 188-94.

[5] Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 6-7, 12-15.

and one cavalry divisions backed up by a Special Reserve of 80,000, with a second line territorial force of 300,000 (uniting the former Volunteers and Militia) intended to form the basis of a mass army of the nation should the need arise. Fully modernized, highly trained and well-equiped, the BEF was to become one of the finest forces of its size by 1914.[6]

The great debate in British defence policy which ensued in the meantime concerned the extent to which British military resources should be committed to the maintenance of a suitable balance of power on the European continent in view of the needs of both imperial and home defence. The growing menace of German military and naval might, coupled with a seemingly belligerent attitude over Morocco, effectively turned the scales in favour of the continentalists. As Russian power declined after the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, the British were able to envisage a settlement with this other "traditional" enemy. In 1907, Great Britain and Russia resolved their differences on the Indian frontier in Afghanistan and in Persia, thereby completing the Triple Entente. Thereafter, the BEF was aimed not at defence of either the North-West Frontier in India or alternately at continental defence, but, as the British General Staff supposed from the beginning, solely at the defence of the continent.[7]

---

[6] On the institutional reforms of the British Army, see W. S. Hamer, The British Army: Civil-Military Relations, 1885-1905 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 175-263. On the Haldane Reforms, see Michael Howard, Studies in War and Peace (London: Temple Smith, 1970), pp. 83-98. For a broader treatise on the development of the British Army, see Correlli Barnett, Britain and Her Army, 1509-1970 (London: Allen Lane, 1970). For an assessment of its capabilities in 1914, see Major-General Eric R. L. Sixsmith, British Generalship in the Twentieth Century (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1970), pp. 37-44.

[7] See Howard, Continental Commitment, pp. 9-46.

German testing of the Entente Cordiale by means of the Tangier crisis of 1905 had, in fact, changed the nature of the arrangement. Concerned that the crisis might deteriorate and envisaging the possibility of war against Germany on the continent, the British Government secretly authorized staff conversations with the French in 1906. The absence of any political commitment was nevertheless carefully spelled out, as neither the French nor the British were prepared to assume broader obligations at that point, largely because of distrust and fear of involvement in the quarrels of each other. The Entente Cordiale thus remained a loose friendship but with intermittent staff conversations until the events of 1911 and 1912 put the Entente on a new footing approaching that of *de facto* military alliance.[8]

The Transformation of French Military Institutions, 1911-1914

The Agadir crisis in 1911 had a profound impact on French military policy. Like Munich in 1938, it seemed to mark the watershed between the hope for peace and the prospect of war. More importantly, it gave rise to a powerful nationalist resurgence, which had simmered in select groups since the 1905 Moroccan crisis, but now, focused in the Capital, affected all political groups to some extent, and especially those of the Centre and Right.[9] A twentieth-century democracy, France, in many respects, had come to enjoy both the benefits and disadvantages of the participation of public opinion in political-military matters and defence policy. Thus, in response to the nationalist movement, the French Government adopted a more aggressive policy of preparedness for war. A new Chief of Staff in favour of offensive doctrine was appointed, Staff and Command were tightened on the German model, and a three-year conscription law was voted to put the standing army on par with that of Germany.[10] The alliance with Russia and the *Entente Cordiale* with Great Britain were strengthened. Reflecting the strength of the movement, Raymond Poincaré, a conservative nationalist, was installed as Prime Minister in 1912 without, however, any change in the Centre-dominated Chamber.[11]

---

[8] See Williamson, *Politics of Grand Strategy*, pp. 34-88, 131-67.

[9] For an analysis of the causes and course of the French nationalist revival, see Eugen Weber, *The Nationalist Revival in France, 1905-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959).

A significant aspect of the nationalist movement was the military doctrine of the offensive, which to the Centre and Right had become associated with the French will to victory.[12] Ferdinand Foch, the chief proponent of the new school of thought, had long preached the merits of the *offensive à outrance* at the *Ecole Supérieure de la Guerre* (War Academy) as professor in the late 1890's and, after the turn of the century, as its commandant. Essentially a garbled version of Clausewitz, whom the French discovered in the 1880's, French offensive doctrine called for both strategic and tactical offensives as the best means of imposing one's will on the enemy. Overemphasizing the psychological aspect of war, the doctrine grossly underestimated the material aspect in a technological age of radically increased fire power. Unrestrained strategic application of the doctrine in 1914 without adequate surveillance of the enemy would lead nigh unto disaster; wholesale tactical application of it would cost the lives of many young Frenchmen.[13]

---

[10] The best treatment of these reforms is found in David B. Ralston, *The Army of the Republic: The Place of the Military in the Political Evolution of France, 1871-1914* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1967), pp. 319-71.

[11] See Gordon Wright, *Raymond Poincaré and the French Presidency* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1942), pp. 25-29, 31ff; Jacques Chastenet, *Histoire de la Troisième République*, Vol. IV: *Jours inquiets et jours sanglants (1906-1918)* (Paris: Hachette, 1957), pp. 73, 96, 109-11.

[12] See Richard D. Challener, *The French Theory of the Nation in Arms, 1866-1939* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965), pp. 86-87; cf. Maréchal [Joseph J. C.] Joffre, *Mémoires du Maréchal Joffre (1910-1917)* (2 vols.; Paris: Librairie Plon, 1933), I, 8.

None of that was apparent, however, to the leading generals of the Republic who assembled in February, 1911, to hear two lectures by Lieutenant-Colonel François Loyzeau de Grandmaison, head of the prestigious operations bureau of the General Staff of the Army. An audacious all-out offensive on the German model, affirmed Grandmaison, would provide more security than the cautious defensive-offensive strategy then in vogue by obliging the enemy to conform to one's movements. Only through "immediate and total attack," he argued, could one provoke in the adversary that "depression which rendered him incapable of activity."[14]

The appeal was largely to the national vanity of the generals: a more aggressive approach to national defence would prevent an initial loss of frontier territory and allow an immediate offensive against Germany, providing, of course, that the Russians could be persuaded to divert part of German numerical superiority by an immediate attack in East Prussia. Tactically, the offensive seemed to correspond with the inherent élan of the French soldier. The quasi-unanimous enthusiasm of the generals for the doctrine, which gained the support of the future Radical War Minister, Colonel Adolphe Messimy, spelled the dismissal of General Victor Michel, the Commander-in-Chief designate, who alone defended the old defensive-offensive strategy, and his replacement by General Joseph Jacques-Césaire Joffre, an ardent partisan of the offensive.[15] Addressing an audience of journalists, Messimy declared: "With General Joffre . . . I shall strive to develop the doctrine of the offensive with which our army is beginning to be impregnated."[16]

---

[13] For a critical evaluation of French offensive thought, see Basil H. Liddell Hart, "French Military Ideas before the First World War," in Martin Gilbert, ed., A Century of Conflict: Essays for A. J. P. Taylor (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1966), pp. 31-41. For a more favourable view, see Henry Contamine, La revanche (1871-1914) (Paris: Editions Berger-Levrault, 1957), pp. 167ff. See also Dallas D. Irvine, "The French Discovery of Clausewitz and Napoleon," Journal of the American Military Institute, IV (1940), 143-61 and Stefan T. Possony and Etienne Mantoux, "Du Picq and Foch: The French School," in Edward Mead Earle, ed., Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler (New York: Atheneum, 1967 [c. 1941]), pp. 206-33.

[14] Contamine, La revanche, p. 167; see also Eugene Carrias, La pensée militaire française (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1960), p. 296. This is the best account of French military thought from earliest times to the Fourth Republic.

Politically, Joffre was a candidate of the Radical centre. The son of a prosperous barrelmaker and once an active freemason, he had good political connections with the Sarraut brothers and the Radical Dé-

---

[15] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 9-12, 29-35; Carrias, La pensée militaire, p. 296; Adolphe Messimy, Mes souvenirs (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1937), pp. 74-75. Cf. Contamine, La revanche, p. 178. Joffre was Messimy's third choice, behind Gallieni and Pau, whose records were more brilliant. Gallieni, the choice of Prime Minister Caillaux, was a proponent of defensive-offensive strategy and may have been unacceptable to Messimy on this count, although his age, which gave him but three more years of active service, and some less credible reasons, such as a career solely in the colonies and his role in bringing about Michel's downfall, are those generally cited. Pau, who was also considered before Joffre, was unacceptable because of his catholicism and his insistence upon the right of appointment of generals. (See Ralston, Army of the Republic, pp. 332-33; Messimy, Souvenirs, pp. 76-77; cf. Carrias, La pensée militaire, p. 298; Contamine, La revanche, pp. 118, 123.

[16] B. H. Liddell Hart, Reputations Ten Years After (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1928), p. 10.

pêche de Toulouse.[17] His military ideas were those of the Centre and Right, in sharp contrast with those of the Socialist Left. The Socialists, under Jaurès, advocated a militia army on the Swiss model composed of reservists and favoured a defensive-offensive strategy to allow for the slower concentration of the force. As a proponent of the immediate offensive, Joffre, in harmony with conservative thought, considered reservists capable of only secondary tasks because of their initial lack of cohesion and solidarity. In his view, only a highly disciplined army of active corps capable of delivering an immediate decisive blow could decide the short war which he and nearly all his contemporaries expected. The financial and economic resources of the state, it was widely held, would be unable to withstand the maintenance of mass armies in the field over a long period of time, and thus oblige the early cessation of hostilities.[18] Because Joffre's appointment represented a temporary setback for the Socialists, his position would be secure in peacetime only as long as the Centre continued to dominate the Chamber.

The nationalist movement also determined the wide powers given to Joffre as Chief of the General Staff on his appointment July 28, 1911. Previously, the Chief of Staff of the Army, who was responsible to the Minister of War for the "organization and training of the troops, mobilization, armament, defence of the territory and the gathering of provisions for war," had been entirely separate from and independent of the Commander-in-Chief designate who drew up the plans of war. The future Commander-in-Chief thus made plans over whose execution he had no authority.[19] Under the presidency of the War Minister, moreover, the Commander-in-Chief designate served as vice-president of the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre (War Board), a consultative and advisory body consisting of all the generals designated for high command in time of war, including the Chief of Staff of the Army, but which, ironically, advised the Minister on essentially the same matters as those within the jurisdiction of the Chief of Staff of the Army. Providing duality of advice and the separation of staff and command functions, the whole system had in fact been devised to preserve ministerial control of the Army.[20]

---

[17] Contamine, *La revanche*, p. 124; see also Jean de Pierrefeu, *G. Q. G., Secteur I: Trois ans au Grand Quartier Général par le rédacteur du "Communiqué"* (2 vols.; Paris: Edition Française Illustrée, 1920), I, 100; Pierre Varillon, *Joffre* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1956), p. 17.

[18] Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 8, 34, 248-49; Challener, *Nation in Arms*, pp. 71-72, 103-15; Carrias, *La pensée militaire*, p. 300.

As the Agadir crisis approached, however, both the Chamber and the Senate brushed aside republican concern over the concentration of too much military power in the hands of one person and called for a tighter organization of the High Command. The Monis ministry having fallen on the issue, Messimy, War Minister in the new Caillaux ministry formed June 29, 1911, responded vigorously in the heat of the diplomatic crisis by conferring upon the Commander-in-Chief designate the title of Chief of the General Staff on the German model and placing the Staff of the Army (except for personnel) and the military colleges directly under him. Like his German counterpart, Joffre was thus given sweeping authority over the peacetime army with full responsibility for its preparation for war.[21]

---

[19] Ralston, Army of the Republic, pp. 198, 326; Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, p. 114.

[20] Ralston, Army of the Republic, pp. 173-77, 182-91, 198-99, 295-96.

Never in the Third Republic had a general been given so much authority over the Army or been recognized so fully as the sole military advisor of the Government. Although the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre, with Joffre as vice-president, continued to advise on military matters, the Minister soon found his role, before a united body of military technicians, reduced to that of political mouthpiece for the General Staff in the Cabinet and the Chamber. In fact, Joffre, a general in republican France, came to exercise more direct authority over the Army and army policy than Helmuth von Moltke, Chief of the General Staff in authoritarian Germany, for Moltke, though responsible only to the Kaiser, had to pay closer attention to the constant meddling of the chief warlord than did Joffre to his Minister.[22]

One crucial difference emerged. In republican tradition, Messimy nonetheless assured the supremacy of policy over strategic planning by revitalizing the Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale (Council of National Defence) which was "charged with examining all questions which required the co-operation of several ministries." From this inner Cabinet, presided over by the President of the Republic and consisting of the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister, the Minister of War, the Minister of Marine and others as needed, Joffre received advice on the diplomatic situation and, as a result, he was obliged to conform his strategic plans to considerations of policy.[23] Moltke, on the other hand, who owed no allegiance to the German Chancellor or the War Minister, was not obliged to subordinate defence planning to foreign policy.[24]

---

[21] Ibid., pp. 320-40; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 12, 27-28. See also Messimy, Souvenirs, pp. 72-74, 80-82, for a good primary account of the tightening of the command structure.

[22] Ralston, Army of the Republic, pp. 337-39.

[23] Messimy, Souvenirs, p. 82; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 103-06ff, 116-

The implications of these structural differences, with regard to future cooperation with the British, were extremely important. While Moltke, in following the plan of his predecessor, Schlieffen, would be allowed, for want of political control, to commit a grave political blunder so far as Great Britain was concerned by invading Belgium in 1914, Joffre was obliged by his Government as early as 1912 to seek a politically sounder if militarily less desirable operational terrain.[25] The option of British participation on the French side in the event of war was thus maintained, while the possibility of British neutrality desired by Berlin was effectively compromised in advance by the German plan of attack. On the other hand, the vast powers over the Army, conferred on Joffre at the expense of ministerial control, prefigured the even greater powers he would wield as Commander-in-Chief at the beginning of the war. He then would indeed become the effective master of French military policy, and the Government would assume, for a time, the servile role of little more than mouthpiece for the High Command in obtaining his wishes from the British Government and the British Expeditionary Force.

25, 173, 181, 187-90. See Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 209-10, 211, 319, 326.

[24] See Gerhard Ritter, The Sword and the Scepter: The Problem of Militarism in Germany, Vol. II: The European Powers and the Wilhelmian Eupire, 1890-1914, tr. by Heinz Norden (Coral Gables, Fla.: The University of Miami Press, 1970), pp. 119-20ff.

[25] See Ibid., pp. 193-206; Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 210-13.

. . .

By training and experience, Joffre was only partially qualified for the wide-ranging responsibilities conferred on him as Chief of the General Staff. Trained as a military engineer at the Ecole Polytechnique, he had had a distinguished if not brilliant career in the colonies. The construction of railways and fortifications, plus command of a successful expedition against the warlike Tuareg at Timbuctou in 1893-1894, won him rapid promotion without political indebtedness.[26] But as France's top military leader, he knew appallingly little of either strategy or military history. Singularly devoid of imagination, he displayed little interest in intellectual inquiry and read almost nothing beyond his narrow technical field.[27] Nor had he any familiarity with the Staff of the Army. In frank recognition of this deficiency, he insisted, as a condition of his acceptance of the post, on the continuation of General Curières de Castelnau, a highly experienced (but much over-rated) Staff officer, as his Assistant Chief of Staff.[28] Joffre would thus often receive advice of dubious value which, for want of background, he was not properly qualified to evaluate.

In the other role envisaged for him should war come, as Commander-in-Chief, Joffre was more promising. His command experience, while limited to leading a colonial expedition and command of the 6th Division and II Army Corps over four years in France, was about equal to that of his contemporaries, whose military careers had extended over a long period of peace.[29] His zeal for exercises on the map and manoeuvres on the ground during his three years as Chief of Staff would largely remedy any remaining deficiency.[30] Joffre, moreover, possessed one supreme qualification not held by his associates nor the German General Staff. As a railway expert, he fully appreciated the strategic value of the railway for the rapid transfer of armies to a decisive flank during battle. While Directeur de l'Arrière (Director of Support Services) and later as Chief of Staff, Joffre directed railway manoeuvres very similar to the later manoeuvre of the Marne.[31] In an age of mass armies, use of railways for strategic manoeuvre could well be decisive, and indeed that turned out to be the case.

---

[26] See the best biographies of Joffre: General Desmazes, Joffre: La victoire du caractère (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1955), pp. 17-84 and Varillon, Joffre, pp. 15-170; also Contamine, La revanche, pp. 124-25.

[27] Desmazes, Joffre, pp. 64, 247-48; Varillon, Joffre, p. 77.

[28] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 11-13; Messimy, Souvenirs, pp. 77-78; Liddell Hart, Reputations, p. 14.

As a military engineer, Joffre had developed some enviable qualities of mind--a methodical approach, precision, lucidity, and a reputation for getting things done.[32] "Above prejudices of party, cast or religion," he made appointments largely on the basis of merit (although not without awareness of their political implications) and was very severe on those who proved incompetent.[33] Massive, tall, unkempt, this uncharacteristic Frenchman from the south of France with blue eyes and blond hair spoke slowly and articulately, with few gestures, and, like the Egyptian sphinx, appeared silent and imponderable.[34] A hard worker, he possessed a strong sense of responsibility marked by an equal if not more pronounced love of glory and an even greater avidity for the exercise and maintenance of power.[35] From his peasant forbears, he had inherited the stolid virtues of calm, patience and self-reliance and an amazing persistence which, however, also resulted in serious intellectual sclerosis when committed to an erroneous idea.[36] Above all else, he possessed unshakeable self-confidence and an equal assurance in the ability of France to win the war which, along with many of his peers, he fully expected.[37] "I shall fight it, I shall win it," he told an aide-de-camp in 1912.[38] This supreme confidence would allow him in France's darkest hour to calm his associates and plan a stunning reversal of fortunes on the Marne.[39]

---

[29] Desmazes, Joffre, pp. 52-53.

[30] See Joffre, Mémoires, I, 35-37.

[31] Contamine, La revanche, p. 126; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 5-6.

[32] Messimy, Souvenirs, p. 77, citing Gallieni under whom Joffre served at Madagascar.

[33] Général R. Alexandre, Avec Joffre d'Agadir a Verdun: Souvenirs (1911-1916) (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1932), p. 8; Ralston, Army of the Republic, p. 334; Maxime Weygand, Mémoires, Vol. I: Idéal vécu (Paris: Flammarion, 1953), pp. 63, 182.

The organization of Joffre's prewar Staff, with its heavy delegation of responsibility but maintenance of supreme decision-making at the top, prefigured his later style of command. To Castelnau, First Assistant Chief of Staff, Joffre delegated all matters related to operations and later also assigned responsibility for supervision of the Second, Third and Fourth Bureaus, concerned respectively with intelligence, operations and railways, to the holder of the post. When conflict developed between Castelnau and General Auguste Dubail, Chief of Staff of the Army, the latter's post was simply abolished, leaving Castelnau as undisputed advisor on strategy. He in fact assumed major responsibility for the drafting of the new war plan, Plan XVII.[40] Though less a co-partner in command than the First Quartermaster General in Germany, the First Assistant would also become the major-general in wartime charged with execution of the decisions of the Commander-in-Chief.[41]

---

[34] Alexandre, Avec Joffre, p. 7; Contamine, La revanche, p. 125.

[35] Alexandre, Avec Joffre, p. 7; Desmazes, Joffre, p. 64; see Jere Clemens King, Generals and Politicians: Conflict between France's High Command, Parliament and Government, 1914-1918 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), pp. 11-113; Pierrefeu, G. Q. G., pp. 94-97.

[36] See Desmazes, Joffre, pp. 64-65, 247-48; Varillon, Joffre, pp. 17-18.

[37] Contamine, La revanche, p. 126; John C. Cairns, "International Politics and the Military Mind: The Case of the French Republic, 1911-1914," Journal of Modern History, XXV (1953), 280-84.

[38] Alexandre, Avec Joffre, pp. 11-12.

[39] See, for example, Colonel Emile Herbillon, Souvenirs d'un officier de liaison pendant la guerre mondiale: Du général en chef au gouvernement, Vol. I: Sous le commandement du général Joffre (Paris: Editions Jules Tallandier, 1930), pp. 23-25; cf. Liddell Hart, Reputations, p. 39, who considers Joffre's chief merit that of "a national nerve sedative."

To the Second Assistant Chief of Staff Joffre assigned supervision of the First Bureau, responsible for personnel and manpower, a matter of grave concern until the passage of the Three Year conscription law.[42] As aides, Joffre selected some of the bright young men of the Ecole Supérieure de la Guerre, the so-called "Young Turks," because of their zeal for the offensive. Though of low rank, usually captains, and without command experience, this little coterie of whom Gamelin, Renouard and Alexandre were the most prominent, occupied positions of excessive influence simply because of their close contact with the Chief.[43]

---

[40] See Joffre, Mémoires, I, 12-13, 27-28, 182-83; Liddell Hart, Reputations, p. 14; Messimy, Souvenirs, pp. 77-78; Contamine, La revanche, pp. 124-25.

[41] See J. D. Hittle, The Military Staff: Its History and Development (Rev. ed.; Harrisburg, Penn.: The Military Service Publishing Co., 1949), pp. 67, 73.

[42] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 182-83.

As an effective bureaucrat, Joffre commissioned studies, heard reports and then evaluated. While others wrote for him and spoke for him, he nonetheless made the decisions, which he then presented with unyielding persistence to his political superiors, and later to his Allies.[44] Prepared to accept only the advice of his chosen advisors, he would be highly authoritarian in dealing with the British during the war. The BEF he would tend to view as merely another army under his command.

Inasmuch as the BEF was destined to fight side-by-side with the French Army, the doctrine of the French Staff would have a significant impact on future command relations. In Joffre's mind, the offensive was intrinsically connected with the will to victory. His predecessors, who had taken a more defensive stance, were merely reflecting the sense of inferiority of French arms, resulting from the defeat of 1870-71.[45] The most pressing need therefore was to imbue the army with the spirit of the offensive from the highest command to the "last echelons of the troops."[46] For that purpose, extensive Staff manoeuvres on the map and in the field were organized and the rewriting of service manuals commissioned.[47]

---

[43] See Weygand, Mémoires, I, 182; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 16; Alexandre, Avec Joffre, pp. 5-6; Liddell Hart, Reputations, p. 12.

[44] See Joffre, Mémoires, I, 25, 35, 39, 63, 72, 91-92, 95, 112, 121; Weygand, Mémoires, I, 182; Contamine, La revanche, pp. 125-26; Desmazes, Joffre, pp. 64, 248-49.

[45] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 29-30ff.

[46] Ibid., pp. 34-35.

Not all of the senior generals, however, espoused the doctrine. A notable exception was General Charles Lanrezac, who was to command the Fifth French Army next to the British.[48] Evenly divided between the adherents of offensive thought and a more cautious approach, the British Command would have grave difficulty in deciding to what extent it ought to conform to the voluble wishes of the French Commander-in-Chief during the "Great Retreat." Foch, on the other hand, who had provided much of the intellectual underpinning for the doctrine while at the Ecole Supérieure de la Guerre, was so ardent that he ordered an attack upon assumption of a new command during the "Great Retreat" without knowing either the location of his own forces or those of the enemy. His attack was successful.[49] He was later chosen by Joffre to command an Army Group adjacent to the British Army and to work out effective liaison with the British.

At the outbreak of war in 1914, moreover, the French doctrine of the offensive would immediately pit the French Command against Kitchener, the British Secretary of State for War, who in French eyes was "imbued with the principles of colonial warfare" and a complete enemy of the offensive.[50] The French Command, concerned with immediate victory, would be even less able than the British Command to appreciate Kitchener's farsighted wisdom in preparing a mass army capable of deciding the long war which he foresaw.

---

[47] Ibid., pp. 35-39. See Carrias, La pensée militaire, pp. 296-97.

[48] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 40; Contamine, La revanche, pp. 174, 178-79.

[49] Possony and Mantoux, "Du Picq and Foch: The French School," in Makers of Modern Strategy, pp. 218-33; Ferdinand Foch, Journées, (unedited typescript in Fournier-Foch Archives held by Henri Fournier-Foch, 3, square de Ranelagh, Paris, XVIe), p. 4. (Archives of Fournier-Foch hereinafter cited as AFF.) Foch did not keep a daily diary but recorded significant events in his Journées in periods of calm shortly after their occurrence.

With regard to the material preparation of the French Army, to which the small British Force would link its fortunes in the field, the doctrine of the offensive produced some serious blind spots. Belief in battle as the only viable form of warfare led to systematic neglect of fortifications,[51] whose defensive value nonetheless was to be proven later, especially at Verdun. Likewise, the value of heavy artillery was discounted, for, according to the proponents of the offensive, it would only limit the manoeuvrability of armies of attack.[52] As a result, the French Army, while equal to the German Army in field artillery and machine guns at the outset of the war, was inferior in heavy artillery, having only "batteries of outdated models unequally divided between armies and army corps" as compared with a group of light howitzers (105's) per division and a group of heavy guns (150's) per army corps in the German Army.[53] Likewise, the reserves, presumed inadequate for immediate offensive action, were neglected and, in spite of continued Socialist cries against dilution of the reserve officer corps, little effort was made to remedy a serious lack of effective officers, despite an admitted numerical inferiority in their cadre to that of the German reserves.[54] Better artillery and a better officer cadre made the German reserves an effective offensive force at the outset of the war, in contrast to the French reserves which initially held up rather badly under fire.[55] A group of French Reserve divisions would serve uninspiringly on the British right in the early battles of 1914.[56]

---

[50] Lieutenant-Colonel de la Panouse, Military Attaché at London, to the Minister of War, 19 August, 1914, in France, Ministère de la Guerre, Etat-Major de l'Armée--Service Historique, Les Armées Françaises dans la Grande Guerre (105 vols.; Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1922-1939), Tome I, Vol. II, Annexes, Vol. I, no. 93. (Hereinafter cited in format AFGG, I(II) A(I).)

[51] Carrias, La pensée militaire, p. 297; Alexandre, Avec Joffre, pp. 33-34; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 49; Contamine, La revanche, p. 155.

[52] Alexandre, Avec Joffre, pp. 33-34; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 61-62; Weygand, Mémoires, I, 45.

[53] L. Koeltz, La Guerre de 1914-1918: Les opérations militaires (Paris: Editions Sirey, 1966), p. 41. Cf. Contamine, La revanche, p. 197 and Weygand, Mémoires, I, 45. For Joffre's defence, see his Mémoires, I, 60-73, but cf. Contamine, La revanche, pp. 129-30, 133-34, 156.

The general effect of the doctrine of the offensive on morale, however, was beneficial. The troops, according to Joffre, were "ardent, eager, ready for every risk and every sacrifice," reflecting not only the indoctrination of offensive thought[57] but the ardour of the nation from whence they came. Admittedly, the doctrine of the offensive encouraged reckless infantry attacks without adequate artillery preparation, resulting in the needless exposure of attacking infantry to machine gun fire.[58] Yet, despite the heavy losses, French soldiers, after a fortnight of retreat in August heat, were able to turn on the Marne and march victoriously against the enemy.[59] Although continued fixation on the offensive later under conditions of trench warfare appears grossly out of touch with reality, an initially successful reply to the German invasion could not have been made without a sustained will to victory. The difference between the morale of the French Army of 1914, whatever its material deficiencies, and that of the same Army in 1940 is instructive on this point. In both cases, the operation of the coalition would depend to a large extent on the success of the armies in the field.

---

[54] Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 8-10, 248-50; Challener, *Nation in Arms*, pp. 82, 8 -88. For accounts of the half-hearted attempt to remedy this deficiency, see Ralston, *Army of the Republic*, pp. 344-50; J. Monteilhet, *Les institutions militaires de la France (1814-1932)* (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1932), pp. 255-61.

[55] Desmazes, *Joffre*, p. 80; Messimy, *Souvenirs*, p. 282.

[56] Messimy, *Souvenirs*, p. 282.

[57] Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 40; Carrias, *La pensée militaire*, p. 302.

[58] Alexandre, *Avec Joffre*, pp. 34-35; Carrias, *La pensée militaire*, p. 296; Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 40; see "Note pour toutes les armées," 2083, 24 August, 1914, *AFGG*, I(II) A(I), no. 158.

A most pressing concern of French military planners immediately prior to the war, which largely determined their attitude toward British military participation, was the shortage of French manpower. With a population of 39 million French as opposed to 67 million Germans, the result of a low French birth rate since 1871 (when the two populations had been more or less equal), the French were brought face to face with the manpower problem in 1913 by the German decision to induct a higher percentage (though below the French figure) of available two-year recruits. The German plan of expansion would bring the total number of men under arms up to 860,000 in Germany by the end of 1914, as opposed to 525,000 in metropolitan France.[60] To counter this imbalance, Joffre asked the Government in March, 1913, for an extra year of service which would bring active French forces up to approximately 710,000. Allowing for a diversion to the Russian front of a fifth, or about 175,000, from the active German force, the measure, by intensifying French military effort, would restore rough equality between active French and German forces on the western front.[61]

---

[59] Weygand, Mémoires, I, 99.

[60] Contamine, La revanche, pp. 130, 141, 142, 150-51. As on all matters dealing with the prewar preparation of the French Army, Contamine is very good. Ralston, Army of the Republic, pp. 343-71, gives the most extensive analysis in English on the passage of the Three Year Law. See also, Weber, Nationalist Revival, pp. 120-44. Ralston gives the strength of the armed forces in metropolitan France as 480,000 (p. 353). The disparity with the German Army, even before the passage of the

The Cabinet gave its unanimous approval.[62] Although Joffre had powerful political friends, such as Gaston Doumerque, Albert Sarrault, and Joseph Reinach, who could be counted on to present his view in the Chamber,[63] the force which impelled the Three Year Bill into law was the tide of nationalist sentiment which reached a crescendo just after the Agadir crisis when opposition to Caillaux's moderate settlement with the Germans (plus blatant dishonesty) brought his ministry down.[64] Symbolic of the nationalist revival was the appointment of Raymond Poincaré, a Lorraine patriot, as Prime Minister in early 1912. His ministry, based on the nationalist Centre and Right, had as its

---

Three Year Law, was not as great as it might appear, however, for France had 165,000 European and Colonial troops in the colonies in 1914, in comparison to only 7,000 German troops abroad. (Contamine, *La revanche*, p. 150.)

[61] Ralston, *Army of the Republic*, p. 362; Contamine, *La revanche*, pp. 150, 142; Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 90-95. Joffre's figures are 700,000 active in the French Army as opposed to 870,000 Germans.

[62] For a fuller treatment of the arguments used by Joffre in presenting his case, see Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 92-95; Challener, *Nation in Arms*, p. 86; also Ralston, *Army of the Republic*, pp. 354-55; Contamine, *La revanche*, pp. 143-44.

[63] Varillon, *Joffre*, p. 66; Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 98; Ralston, *Army of the Republic*, pp. 363-64. A series of correspondence between Joffre and Reinach is located at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.

[64] Chastenet, *Troisième République*, IV, 90-92, 94-95. Chastenet's six-volume treatment is still the standard work on the Third Republic.

policy the strengthening of alliances and of the Army, in sharp contrast to Caillaux's previous détentism.[65] A year later the same movement elevated strong-man Poincaré to the Presidency of the Republic with the hope that he would revive some of the powers of that office which had fallen into disuse.[66]

Rapid passage of the Three Year Law was thus assured. Reflecting the concentration of nationalist sentiment in the Centre and Right, the bill was passed in the Chamber on August 7 by the strength of these groups, 344-220, against the solid opposition of the Jaurès and Caillaux Left, who resisted the increased burden which would fall upon the working classes and again called for the proper organization of a national militia.[67] The power of public opinion and the ability of influential parties to manipulate it had thus been fully demonstrated. The same public opinion, at a later date, would make Joffre, whose Command had control of the communiqué issued to the newspapers,[68] politically untouchable as the popular hero of the Marne and give him even greater leverage in dealing with the British.

The passage of the measure moreover was indicative of the extent to which the serious manpower deficiency of the French played on French minds. Behind Joffre's most persistent wartime desire with regard to the British, that of obtaining a maximum British participation in the field, lay the fundamental need to tip in Allied favour the delicate numerical balance of forces which emerged on the western front after mobilization. The close relationship between French prewar policy and strategy had another important implication for future relations with the British. The basic French wartime aim of obtaining maximum participation from the British was not only a military goal but a political objective. Joffre would thus have the full support of the Government whenever greater effort was required of the British Expeditionary Force or reinforcements were needed on the western front.

---

[65] Ibid., pp. 95-98; Wright, Poincaré, pp. 25-26.

[66] Wright, Poincaré, pp. 2-11, 14-17, 32-52.

[67] Ralston, Army of the Republic, pp. 360-63; Contamine, La revanche, pp. 146-48; Weber, Nationalist Revival, pp. 120-28; Challener, Nation in Arms, pp. 87-88. The last class called up had only partially completed its training at the outset of war. (Contamine, La revanche, pp. 151-52.)

[68] See George G. Bruntz, Allied Propaganda and the Collapse of the German Empire in 1918 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1938), pp. 8-9.

The French policy of military preparedness, with all its political and military repercussions, had been built on the wave of nationalism which swept the country after the Agadir crisis in 1911. Like many movements of public opinion, however, this one proved to be of a transitory nature, and with the relaxation of international tensions in late 1913, nationalist fervour fell off considerably.[69] By the spring of 1914, when general elections were held, a definite backlash against the Three Year Law, reflecting the lack of enthusiasm outside of Paris for the nationalist movement, gave massive gains to those groups opposed to it. The Socialists, who strongly opposed the measure, became the largest group in the Chamber, with 101 seats.[70] Although a slight majority apparently still favoured retention of the Law, Poincaré had serious difficulty in finding a Premier who would promise even temporarily not to reconsider the measure. René Viviani, a Socialist-Republican, finally agreed to head such a Ministry.[71]

---

[69] Ralston, Army of the Republic, pp. 370-71; Contamine, La revanche, p. 153; see also Wright, Poincaré, pp. 75, 77-82; Weber, Nationalist Revival, pp. 120-28.

[70] See Weber, Nationalist Revival, pp. 129-37.

The new strength of the Left also had important repercussions for Joffre's continuation in office, for he was distinctly the candidate of the Centre and Right. The darling of the Left was General Maurice Sarrail. In the summer of 1914, great pressure from the Left was exerted on Messimy, again War Minister, to replace Joffre with Sarrail. The Army under Joffre, the Left argued, quite correctly, still had serious material deficiencies. The strength of the Left determined Messimy's response. In exchange for a pledge from Sarrail not to attack Joffre in the meantime, Messimy personally promised Sarrail that he would get Joffre's post in the autumn.[72] Joffre's position had become very tenuous indeed and was saved only by the war!

The Consolidation of the Entente Cordiale, 1911-1912

While producing a less dramatic reaction in public opinion in Great Britain than in France, the Agadir crisis of 1911 nonetheless prompted closer staff talks with the French and confirmed the strategy of continental intervention in the event of British participation in a European war. A key figure in both these developments was Brigadier-General Sir Henry Wilson, who, appointed Director of Military Operations in the British General Staff in 1910, has been credited by the French, contemporaries and historians alike, as the father of British intervention on the continent.[73]

---

[71] Ralston, Army of the Republic, pp. 370-71; Wright, Poincaré, pp. 119-24; Weber, Nationalist Revival, pp. 139-41; Contamine, La Revanche, pp. 153-55.

[72] Jan Karl Tannenbaum, General Maurice Sarrail, 1856-1929: The French Army and Left-Wing Politics (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1974), p. 34. See also Contamine, La revanche, p. 158.

Wilson was an unusual personality. Tall, horsefaced, loose-tongued, and contemptuous of superiors, the ambitious Anglo-Irish general was already at 46 a master of political intrigue. He, however, possessed considerable ability as a staff officer and an admirable devotion to duty which contrasted favourably with the dilettantism of portions of the British aristocratic officer corps of his time.[74] As Commandant of Camberley Staff College prior to his appointment as D.M.O., he had made the acquaintance of his counterpart at the _Ecole Supérieure de la Guerre_, Ferdinand Foch.[75] Long discussions on strategy with Foch led to a binding friendship between the two and Wilson's whole-hearted acceptance of Foch's offensive views.[76]

The French responded warmly to the energetic and flamboyant Wilson.[77] Deferential to French military views, ardently francophile and French-speaking, Wilson brought the right credentials from the French point of view to the prewar talks: support of the Anglo-French _Entente_ and enthusiasm for the intervention of British forces on the continent.[78] Out of enthusiasm for this new friend, the French Staff promptly opened file "W" after Wilson's initials, from whence came the French designation of the British Army as "l'Armée W."[79] The French War Ministry, deeming him "a very good friend of France, and sympathetic to its army,"[80] decorated him even prior to the war.[81] In addition to a close rapport with Foch, Wilson engaged in talks with Dubail, Castelnau, Joffre and many others.[82] In Wilson's opinion, Joffre was "a fine, manly, imperturbable soldier with much character and determination";[83] Joffre later described Wilson quite correctly as the "first and finest craftsman" of English cooperation.[84] An ardent and uncritical admirer of the French military establishment, Wilson made no attempt to assert Britain's right to participate in the formulation of joint war plans. His sole concern was to have British forces in proper condition and on the spot in time to conform to French movements.[85]

---

[73] See Foch, _Journées_, _AFF_, pp. 506; Contamine, _La revanche_, pp. 128-29.

[74] Williamson, _Politics of Grand Strategy_, pp. 167-68.

[75] Major-General Sir C. E. Callwell, _Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson: His Life and Diaries_ (2 vols.; London: Cassell and Co., 1927), I, 77-78.

[76] _Ibid._, pp. 77-79, 80, 88; Alexandre, _Avec Joffre_, p. 108.

[77] Alexandre, _Avec Joffre_, p. 108; Maréchal Ferdinand Foch, _Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la guerre_ (2 vols.; Paris: Librairie Plon, 1931), I, xxvi-xxvii.

Under Wilson, staff talks with the French took on a new impetus. In March, 1911, he informed Colonel Victor Huguet, the French Military Attaché in London, that not just four divisions, as decided in the 1908 invasion review, but all six infantry divisions of the Expeditionary Force would go to France and be ready for action by the seventeenth day. To work out the timetable for this accelerated mobilization schedule, Wilson, largely on his own initiative, went to Paris in July during the Agadir crisis and had very intimate talks with Dubail, the Chief of Staff of the Army, and with the War Minister. While giving scrupulous lip service to the non-committal nature of staff talks, Wilson, however, as on previous occasions, gave a badly misleading picture of British enthusiasm for intervention by assuring the French that "good work on the general staff, prepared in cooperation and in advance, could singularly influence the definitive decision."[86]

---

[78] Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 168-69, 209.

[79] See Alexandre, Avec Joffre, p. 108.

[80] Patricia E. Prestwich, "French Attitudes toward Britain, 1911-1914" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1973), pp. 292-93. This fine study has a very good chapter on the attitudes of the French Army toward its British counterpart in the immediate prewar period.

[81] Callwell, Wilson, I, 117.

[82] Ibid., I, 104, 122.

[83] Ibid., I, 105.

[84] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 16.

[85] Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 208-09.

The 1911 talks resulted in a signed memorandum summarizing ~~the~~ status of the Entente's military arrangements. The Expeditionary Force was to consist of six infantry divisions and one cavalry division and total 150,000 men. Rouen and Le Havre would replace the more distant Cherbourg as ports of debarkation and the Force would be in its staging area by the thirteenth day. For the first time, a concentration area was designated, that of the St. Quentin-Cambrai-Arras neighbourhood.[87]

Joffre, who received his appointment just after Wilson's visit, responded to the increasing cordiality of the talks with confidence and enthusiasm and, as a result, was more candid and open than his predecessors in communicating intelligence reports and plans to the British. In his revision of Plan XVI, moreover, Joffre included detailed provision for the concentration of British troops on the French left, and in line with his own forward deployment of troops for a quick offensive, he asked Wilson in September to move the British staging area forward to the Maubeuge-Hirson-Le Cateau area to allow for immediate British participation in the initial encounters, should the Germans attack, as anticipated, across Belgium below the Meuse.[88] From the September talks, in which Wilson for the first time learned in detail of the French concentration plan, the French General Staff concluded, at least tentatively, that immediate British assistance would be forthcoming.[89]

---

[86] Ibid., pp. 113, 173-74.

[87] Ibid., pp. 175-76.

Wilson, however, was only partially representative of British military intentions. To use a modern term, the French were thus faced with a "credibility gap." While the French Staff eventually learned to discount some of his assurances of British support, they failed to realize that the Anglo-Irish Wilson's opposition to the imposition of Home Rule in Ireland by military force made him persona non grata with Herbert Asquith's Liberal Government and thus a very dubious choice for the wartime role of coordinator of Anglo-French military cooperation.

Wilson, nevertheless, argued the case for continental intervention with telling effect before an all-day meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence on August 23, 1911. The purpose of the meeting, called by Asquith in response to the seemingly belligerent attitude of Germany during the Agadir crisis, was to resolve the long-standing conflict of strategy between the Army and the Royal Navy. The latter, representing the "blue water" school, continued, despite earlier attempts at coordination, to advocate, along the lines of successful eighteenth-century strategy, close blockade of enemy ports and raids on the enemy coast, which, it affirmed, would distract and divert a greater proportion of enemy forces than a direct military intervention on land. Wilson, on the other hand, maintained, as had a sub-committee report of the CID in 1908, that immediate military intervention on the continent was necessary to prevent French collapse.[90] Wilson, moreover, was convinced that Germany would violate Belgian territory and foresaw the necessity for Great Britain to join France as a guarantor of Belgian neutrality. Along with the French Staff, he had come to believe that the German Army, for want of manpower, would not be able to extend its sweep across Belgium beyond the Belgian Meuse. He further argued, quite inconsistently, that the Germans would limit their violation of Belgian territory to the area below the Meuse in the hope of avoiding Belgian hostilities. The British Expeditionary Force, massed on the French left, would thus be in a position to deliver a decisive blow on the German right flank. Britain thus held in her hands the fate of France and by a timely intervention would be able to prevent German domination of the continent.[91]

---

[88] Ibid., pp. 208, 178.

[89] Poincaré, Au service, I, 184. Cf. Joffre, Mémoires, I, 107-08. See also Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 208, 178.

Impressed with Wilson's arguments, the Committee gave its approval to the strategy of continental intervention, which was later confirmed by Asquith's appointment of Winston Churchill, a committed interventionist, as First Lord of the Admiralty. The only serious objection to Wilson's plan raised at the meeting was from Churchill, then Secretary of State for Home Affairs, and Sir John French, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, on the dangers for a British force on the French left in the event of a wide German sweep through Belgium. This objection Wilson quickly brushed aside.[92] The Committee would have done well to pursue this question further, however, for the grave error in Wilson's otherwise remarkable assessment, stemming essentially from too close an association with the French Staff, was to discount the possibility of a wide German sweep across Belgium.[93] By failing to anticipate the full extent of the German sweep across Belgium, his plan would thus expose the BEF to grave danger on the French left wing at the outset of hostilities.[94] Wilson, moreover, calculated the balance of forces far too finely and failed to realize that a heavier weight than six infantry and one cavalry divisions would be required to tip the balance decisively in Anglo-French favour.

---

[90] See Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 107-12, 186-93; Howard, Continental Commitment, pp. 42-45; Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 58-59.

[91] Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 168-69, 184-91; Howard, Continental Commitment, pp. 45-47.

Unfortunately for the continuity of British strategy, Wilson's strategic concept for the use of the Expeditionary Force was not shared entirely by all prominent British military personalities. Sir John French, for example, who was later to command the British Expeditionary Force, shared Wilson's enthusiasm for the Anglo-French Entente and intervention on the continent,[95] but he had serious reservations on the danger the Force would be exposed to on the French flank, and would speak out at the beginning of the war in favour of a sea-borne operation on Antwerp, using the Royal Navy as the bow for launching the BEF to a target of strategic value.[96] Likewise, Lord Horatio Kitchener, the future Secretary of State for War, when brought face to face with Wilson's plan on August 5, 1914, would express similar fears for the safety of the Force on the French left flank and, to the exasperation of the French Command, would force an immediate reevaluation of British strategy.

---

[92] Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 188-93, 195-96; Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 56-59, 77.

[93] His initial assessment in November, 1910, before his talks with the French Staff in 1911, was that the Germans would make a wide sweep across Belgium. Again in September, 1911, the French persuaded him that the Germans were incapable of as broad a sweep as he supposed. (Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 169, 181.)

[94] Cf. Ibid., pp. 169-70.

[95] Letter from French to Foch, January 9, 1914, AFF, "Mal French" file.

The strategy of intervention during the First World War, effected according to the 1911 plan, later became the subject of a great deal of criticism, especially by B. H. Liddell Hart, who, responding to the terrible losses of the war, condemned the strategy as a departure from the traditional British method of making war. But, as Professor Norman Gibbs has pointed out, the British, in previous wars for continental hegemony, had been able to preserve an acceptable balance of power on the continent and maintain in neutral hands the vital Channel ports, the terminals of British continental trade, only by application in complementary fashion of blockade and amphibious operations, as advocated by the Navy in 1911, and continental intervention when necessary.[97] Moreover, while the strategy of intervention resulted in excessively heavy losses on the western front, it is highly doubtful given the unique technological conditions which prevailed and the failure of the generals to adapt their tactics accordingly, if losses would have been much less severe in major peripheral actions elsewhere. The Gallipoli experience is a case in point. On the other hand, it is clear in retrospect that in the absence of substantial British military support the French would have fallen, if not in 1914, certainly in 1916 or 1917, creating a situation as desperate for the British as that of June, 1940.[98] The military planners of 1911 made that calculation correctly.

---

[96] Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 188, 365. French retained throughout his command this fixation on the defence of Antwerp and proposed on several occasions during his command a land action from the north of France to free the port.

[97] See Gibbs, "British Strategic Doctrine, 1918-1939," pp. 188-94; cf. Howard, Continental Commitment, p. 45. For an appreciation of the post-World War II historiographical debate on British strategy during World War I, see John P. Campbell, "Refighting Britain's Great Patriotic War," International Journal, XXVI (1971), no. 4 (autumn), 686-705.

Ironically, because British interests were closely tied to the survival of France, those who had a low assessment of French capabilities were likely to favour a larger commitment to French defence. Therein lay the key to the later attitude toward the French of Kitchener and Churchill, two of the most powerful Ministers during the "War of Movement." Churchill, for example, who, as First Lord of the Admiralty, would greatly facilitate continental intervention after 1911 and again at the outset of the war, believed in 1911 that a force of 290,000, twice that of the current BEF, would be required by the fortieth day to tip the balance in French favour.[99] Field Marshal Kitchener had an even lower assessment of French capabilities. In London prior to his appointment as Egyptian Consul-General, he refused to attend the August 23 meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence but "sent word to Haldane [the Secretary of State for War] that he was sure the Germans would beat the French, and he would have no part in any decision which the Ministers might think fit to take." "If they imagined he was going to take command of the army in France," he added, "he would see them damned first."[100] Initially opposed to continental intervention, Kitchener as Secretary of State for War would nonetheless follow a consistent, if sometimes covert, policy of unstinted support of the French on the field of battle, while at the same time preparing a mass army for ultimate British triumph.

---

[98] Cf. Howard, Continental Commitment, pp. 54-55.

[99] Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 59-65.

The popular base for a continental strategy, moreover, was very narrow. British public opinion, the dominant force in British as in French public life, in fact, showed very little enthusiasm for British participation in a continental war. Part of the press favoured a closer tie with France; part, reconciliation with Germany: the general mood was profoundly pacifist and opposed to intervention on any side.[101] The Cabinet was badly divided on the question, as the ruling Liberal party had a strong Radical faction which was violently opposed to continental intervention and demanded rapprochement with Germany. When Ministers of the Radical group learned of staff conversations with the French in late 1911, a major Cabinet crisis ensued which obliged Asquith to reiterate the non-committal nature of staff conversations with the French and to attempt a diplomatic settlement with Germany in early

---

[100] Viscount Oliver Esher, ed., Journals and Letters of Reginald, Viscount Esher, Vol. III: 1910-1915 (London: Ivor Nicholson & Watson, 1938), p. 58. Entry in Esher's Journal of September 6, 1911. See also Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 187-88.

[101] See Prestwich, French Attitudes, p. 255; cf. Howard, Continental Commitment, pp. 31-50; Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 64.

1912 despite a new and more threatening German Navy Law.[102]

The Agadir crisis, with Wilson's contrivance, in sum had led to closer staff arrangements with the French and acceptance by the Cabinet of the strategy of continental intervention, both of which were very important steps toward preparation of an Anglo-French military coalition. But British participation in a European war was by no means a foregone conclusion, as witnessed by the lack of popular support for intervention within the country and the divisions within the Cabinet on the question of staff talks with the French. The question of intervention on the continent, to the dismay of the French Command, would thus require further consideration after British entry into the war. The lack of unanimity on the details of that strategy among top military personnel and the controversy within the CID between the interventionists and the "blue water" school, moreover, assured that the initial British strategy as accepted in 1911 would also be challenged at the outset and again at the end of September, 1914, when Wilson's plan failed to achieve the promised Anglo-French victory over the German Army and as a result exposed Antwerp and the vital Channel ports to German control.

Although the Agadir crisis prompted the military tightening of the _Entente Cordiale_, the event which sparked its political consolidation was the 1912 German Navy Law which, by directly threatening British naval supremacy, caused the British to seek security by closer naval cooperation with the French.[103] Earlier, the 1908 German naval bill, which had accelerated construction of heavy capital ships in the Dreadnought class, narrowing the British margin of superiority, had created a furore in British public opinion not unlike that caused in France by the second Moroccan crisis.[104] The 1912 German Navy Law not only accelerated construction of battleships in the Dreadnought class, but put the German fleet on a nearly active footing. The British Government, under Radical pressure, first attempted, notably by Haldane's trip to Berlin in early 1912, to negotiate mutual reductions in naval construction, but these talks soon foundered, largely because of German insistence that the British adopt an attitude of strict neutrality and hence break their tie with France in exchange for an end to the German naval race. Although the British, by an intensified programme of naval construction, were able to maintain the desired sixty per cent superiority in capital ships over Germany in the North Sea, they were unable to maintain their traditional two-power standard in the Mediterranean and as a result were obliged, despite a significant public outcry, to rely in part upon the French for the protection of their Mediterranean interests.[105]

---

[102] Williamson, _Politics of Grand Strategy_, pp. 197-204, 249-63, 296-98.

Since the beginning of informal Anglo-French naval conversations in 1906, British defence of the French coast and Channel ports in exchange for French defence of British interests in the Mediterranean had been envisaged in the event of war. But the concentration and readiness of the German Fleet under the new Law obliged the British in 1912 to resort to the traditional wartime strategy of concentration in home waters in order to maintain the margin of superiority necessary to guard against a surprise attack. The French, on the other hand, anxious to assure their line of communication for the transfer of troops from their colonies, withdrew their Atlantic squadron from Brest and stationed it on Toulon. These strategic decisions, taken independently of each other, led to the formal opening of naval conversations in mid-1912 which, in their final form, provided for British defence of the Upper Channel, Anglo-French cooperation in defence of the Lower Channel and French primacy with British support in defence of the Mediterranean.[106]

---

[103] For a full account, see Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 227-48, 265-99. See also Paul G. Halpern, The Mediterranean Naval Situation, 1908-1914 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 13-110.

[104] See Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 19-22, 36-39.

[105] See Ibid., pp. 94-113; Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 249-70; Howard, Continental Commitment, pp. 48-49.

Pursuing a policy of military and diplomatic preparedness, the French Government of Raymond Poincaré used the opening of official naval conversations as an opportunity for the political tightening of the Entente Cordiale. Keenly alert to the moral obligation of mutual support implied in the naval arrangements, Poincaré, who had been rebuffed earlier in his attempt to tighten the Entente following the worrisome Haldane conversations, now sought a written definition of Entente obligations from the British. Unwilling because of the climate of opinion to make a firm political commitment, the British nonetheless promised in an exchange of letters in November, 1912, to consult in time of crisis and then, if mutual action were decided, to take into account the previous staff and naval conversations.[107]

---

[106] See Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 111-17; Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 227-28, 232-37, 243-48, 318-27; Howard, Continental Commitment, pp. 48-49.

The quasi-alliance was thus virtually complete. Having begun as a mere diplomatic rapprochement, the Entente Cordiale "had progressively evolved into a friendly partnership with naval and military features directed against Germany,"[108] and capable of transformation at a moment's notice into a full-fledged military alliance. Devoid of any political commitment beyond the promise to consult in time of crisis and the moral obligation implied in the division of responsibility for naval defence, the arrangement was bonded, nonetheless, by the defence needs of each of the partners. As the strongest military power on the continent, Germany, by an intransigent attitude in the conduct of her foreign affairs, as exemplified in the two Moroccan crises and an accelerated challenge to British naval superiority, had, in substance, forged a virtual coalition against herself, thus providing, well in advance of hostilities, the basis for Anglo-French cooperation during the war.[109]

Plan XVII and the British

Plan XVII, the new French war plan, was based on a reassessment of the international situation, offensive thought, and an error. Drawn up exclusively by the French General Staff, without the advice of British military authorities, it nonetheless took account of British policy in Europe and made provision for uncertain British participation alongside the French Army. The chief result for future joint actions was that it assigned to the British Expeditionary Force on the French left flank a mission out of all proportion to its means.

---

[107] Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 255-56, 258-63, 280-99; Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 112-13; Grey, Twenty-Five Years, I, 93-96.

[108] Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, p. 299.

[109] Cf. Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 112-15.

When Joffre assumed office, the war plan in effect was the 1909 plan of General Henri de Lacroix, Plan XVI. Based on the defensive-offensive school of strategy, Plan XVI massed five armies along the Franco-German border from Belfort to Vouziers with a sixth army to the rear at Chalons-sur-Marne, free to manoeuvre to the left or right. The plan provided for a defensive stance initially until the enemy revealed his intentions and then counter-offensive thrusts in Lorraine and in the Ardennes across southern Luxembourg.[110] The chief flaw of Lacroix's plan was that with over half his forces south of the line Verdun-Paris, it made almost no provision for a wide German sweep through Belgium.[111]

Plan XVI was not sufficiently offensive for Joffre, as it kept twelve reserve divisions in the rear and deployed two active army corps against Italy, then occupied in the conquest of Tripoli and whose neutrality was to be expected in any case, in spite of her membership in the Triple Alliance. These additional forces Joffre promptly moved forward to the northeast, providing, in consequence of the recent Russian promise of a prompt diversionary attack in East Prussia, the necessary equality of forces for an immediate offensive against the German Army. By moving the left wing of his concentration only a short distance to the northwest from Vouziers to Mézières, Joffre nevertheless failed to correct the basic defect in the plan. The British, on whose participation Joffre had come to rely, were merely asked to move the staging area of the BEF forward from the St. Quentin-Cambrai-Arras region to the Maubeuge-Hirson-Le Cateau triangle in order to deliver an immediate blow against the German right wing in the event of a German movement across Belgium below the Meuse. Taking the form of variant 1 to Plan XVI, these alterations, which became effective in September, 1911, contained all the essential ingredients of Joffre's later Plan XVII.[112]

---

[110] Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 122-24. See also AFGG, I(I), pp. 35-37; Contamine, La revanche, pp. 116-17.

[111] See Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 121-22; cf. Joffre, Mémoires, I, 22.

Joffre and his Staff then set about to draw up a more definitive plan. In order to place his strategic planning in proper diplomatic perspective, Joffre sought guidance from his Government on the international situation. An appraisal of the diplomatic scene obtained from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in October, 1911, confirmed most of the views of his Staff on the likely political configuration in the event of a European war. Russia, a dependable ally, would be on the French side. Italy would probably be neutral. No guidance was offered as to the likelihood of British intervention, considered probable by the Staff at the moment. Belgian neutrality, however, must not be violated in order to avoid bringing in the British against France over Belgium. Only after a German violation of Belgian territory could passage be considered.[113]

---

[112] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 22-25, 107-09; Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 174-78, 208; Poincaré, Au service, I, 184. Despite his later protestations to the contrary, Joffre had not fully perceived the danger of a wide German sweep through Belgium. (See Joffre, Mémoires, I, 22-25; cf. Contamine, La revanche, p. 127.)

[113] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 103-10; Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 209-11.

The Russian alliance, in reality, constituted the keystone to French prewar defence planning. In effect, failure of the French to match German population growth and the expansion of German industry since the Franco-Prussian War meant that France would have to depend in the twentieth century on the action of her Allies for survival.[114] The Russian alliance was particularly valuable to the French, as it would force Germany into a two-front war and, as a result, divert a portion of her resources to the east.

The French General Staff correctly postulated that in a two-front war, Germany would attempt to crush France immediately by a massive attack in the west before turning to the east. The French therefore were anxious to have the Russians launch an immediate diversionary attack against Germany in order to draw off German troops to the east, rather than attack to the south against Austria-Hungary, as was strategically advantageous to the Russians.[115] Using the lever of Russian need for continued loans for industrial development, French political and military authorities repeatedly pressed the Russians after 1900 for the construction of strategic railways in Western Russia which would make possible the rapid concentration against Germany desired by the French.[116] Finally, in August, 1911, under the urging of General Dubail, who unfolded Joffre's plan for an immediate French offensive in the west, the Russians formally promised for the first time to engage 700,000 - 800,000 men against Germany by the sixteenth day of mobilization, even though Russian mobilization would be only partially completed.[117] The promise of this immediate diversion, according to Joffre, allowed the French Staff to abandon all reserve on their own front and to prepare for an immediate offensive, which was done in variant 1 to Plan XVI and later in Plan XVII.[118] French adoption of an offensive strategy after 1911 was thus based in large part on the assurance of immediate and large scale Russian action on Germany's eastern borders.

---

[114] See René Albrecht Carrié, A Diplomatic History of Europe Since the Congress of Vienna (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1958), pp. 146-47, 154-55.

[115] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 26-27; Youri Danilov, La Russie dans la guerre mondiale (1914-1917), tr. by Alexandre Kaznakov (Paris: Payot, 1927), pp. 117, 127-32. This memoir by the prewar Russian First Quartermaster General is still a valuable source on Russian military planning.

[116] Chastenet, Troisième République, IV, 110-11; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 129-32; D. N. Collins, "The Franco-Russian Alliance and the Russian Railways, 1891-1914," The Historical Journal, XVI (1973), 777-88; Dani-

Some doubts nonetheless still lingered on concerning the reliability of Russian assurances as a result of the Russo-German Potsdam talks in 1910 and the germanophilia of portions of the Russian court.[119] French political and military leaders therefore made a considerable effort to ensure complete fidelity of the Russian ally. Poincaré, for example, made two trips to Russia for that purpose, one as Prime Minister in 1912 and the other as President of the Republic in 1914. The highest ranking military authorities exchanged visits: Grand Duke Nicholas Nicholaevich, the likely choice for Russian Commander-in-

---

lov, La Russie, p. 117.

[117] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 129-32; Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, p. 208.

[118] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 26-27; R. A. Pichot-Duclos, Réflexions sur ma vie militaire: Au G. Q. G. de Joffre (Paris: B. Arthaud, 1947), p. 196; AFGG, I(I), p. 19.

[119] Cairns, "International Politics and the Military Mind," pp. 274-76; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 132.

Chief, attended French military manoeuvres in 1912; General Joffre reciprocated with a similar visit to Russia in 1913.[120] The relative formality in Russo-French military relations prior to the war, however, must not obscure their great worth to the French.[121] Indeed, faithful observance of prewar arrangements by the Russians in August, 1914, led to the diversion of two vital German army corps to the eastern front and thus contributed significantly to the victory of the Marne.[122]

With regard to the Italians, Joffre took a somewhat disparaging attitude. Informed of the secret Franco-Italian colonial accord of 1902 and the obvious alienation of Italy from Austria-Hungary in the Triple Alliance, his Staff judged correctly in 1911 that Italy would observe a strict neutrality. Should Italy intervene against the French, moreover, her slow mobilization, not complete until the eighteenth day, would prevent her from participating in the decisive initial battles. As a result, just four reserve divisions were left along the Italian border in Plan XVII to provide security against a possible Italian intervention.[123] Italian neutrality thus assisted Joffre in his plan for an immediate offensive against Germany.

While the Russian and Italian attitudes could be gauged with reasonable certainty in the prewar period, that of Great Britain remained somewhat ambiguous. Though Great Britain had agreed to naval and military conversations, she had been unwilling to promise military support, a "keen disappointment particularly to the military element."[124] The Entente Cordiale, despite its military trapping, in the final analysis was still a friendship, not an alliance. Failing to obtain a firm commitment of British support, the French Government sought to remove every obstacle to British intervention in the hope that common interest would oblige British participation in the event of war and attempted to make staff arrangements as morally binding as possible. The French Staff was faced with the difficult task of framing French strategy around the needs and uncertainties of British defence policy.

---

[120] See Chastenet, Troisième République, IV, 110-11, 174-75; Weygand, Mémoires, I, 41-43; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 130-32.

[121] See Cairns, "International Politics and the Military Mind," p. 278; Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 223, 317-18.

[122] See Jere Clemens King, ed., The First World War (London: Macmillan, 1972), p. 24.

[123] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 104, 109, 122-23, 169-70, 179-80; cf. AFGG, I(I), pp. 43-44.

The most difficult problem facing General Joffre with regard to the British was that of neutral Belgium. The problem was multifaceted, for it involved not only military but political considerations. From the military point of view, Joffre had come to the conclusion by 1912 that the most favourable area for the deployment of French forces against Germany was across neutral Belgium. The Franco-German border was unsuitable for a French advance because of its geography. Alsace, because of rough terrain and almost immediate contact with the Rhine, was unfavourable for a French offensive action. Lorraine was little better, for the seventy kilometres between the Moselle and the fortified Metz-Thionville region was cut in two by a marshy region, making the manoeuvre of mass armies very difficult. Only the gently rolling countryside of Belgium offered a suitable terrain for the vast manoeuvre envisaged.[125]

---

[124] Colonel Yarde Buller, British Military Attaché at French Headquarters, to Kitchener, British Secretary of State for War, 4 February, 1915, Kitchener Private Office Papers, PRO, WO 159/10.

The Belgians for their part gave little evidence of any desire to welcome an army on their terrain from any side. Their policy was to resist any and all invaders in an effort to protect their neutrality and territorial integrity. This they expressed in unmistakably clear language to the British in 1912, who in turn informed the French.[126] In the debate on a law voted in 1913 to strengthen the Army for that very purpose, Prime Minister de Broqueville revealed Belgian intent to "swing the balance in favour of those powers who were not the first to violate the neutrality of Belgian territory."[127] Only after the invasion of the territory by the Germans in August, 1914, did the Belgians turn to the French and the British for military aid. Absence of any prewar joint war plans and differing strategic conceptions for the defence of the territory would then make for a very difficult liaison with Franco-British forces.[128]

The real reason for Joffre's abandonment of a vast manoeuvre across Belgium, however, was not the attitude of Belgium or even French military scruples, but rather considerations of grand policy imposed on him by the Government. At a meeting of the Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale on January 9, 1912, the Caillaux Ministry, just a few days before its fall, decided that the need for British support ruled out the possibility for France of violating Belgian neutrality before Germany did.[129] On February 21, Joffre again met with the stolid opposition of Poincaré, the new Prime Minister, during an informal session of the Conseil Supérieur at the Quai d'Orsay. Others, Naval Minister Théophile Delcassé and War Minister Alexandre Millerand, were prepared to entertain the idea of an offensive manoeuvre across Belgium, but Poincaré vetoed it on the grounds that an advance into Belgium would alienate the British and cause them to withdraw their support. The most he would concede was that an offensive across Belgium might be undertaken in the event of a "positive threat" of German invasion.[130]

---

[125] Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, p. 212; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 120-21.

[126] Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 216-18.

[127] Quoted in AFGG, I(I), p. 70.

[128] See Messimy, Souvenirs, pp. 286-313.

The Government's decision to disallow a French offensive across Belgium was significant from a number of points of view. First, it demonstrated the sensitivity of successive French Governments to the needs of British policy which had considered Belgium a vital British interest for hundreds of years. Secondly, it showed that despite the sweeping powers given to Joffre, military planning in France, unlike that in Germany, was still fully subordinate to political considerations.[131] Third, the great value attached by consecutive French Governments to the Entente Cordiale with Britain was dramatically demonstrated. Indeed, to keep the British favourably disposed and to maintain the option of British participation on their side, the French were prepared to make very important sacrifices, including that of adopting a less effective military plan. Finally, the Government's decision obliged Joffre to abandon a priori the idea of a vast offensive manoeuvre across Belgium and threw him back on the necessity of planning his manoeuvre under less favourable military conditions elsewhere.[132] British military assistance was ultimately worth that inconvenience, but the immediate problem for the French General Staff was all too apparent.

---

[129] Guy Pedroncini, "Stratégie et relations internationales: la séance du 9 janvier 1912 du conseil supérieur de la défense nationale," Revue d'histoire diplomatique, XCI (1977), 143-58.

[130] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 119-23; Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 212-13, 217-18; Poincaré, Au service, I, 224-25.

[131] For a critique of German military planning, see Gerhard Ritter, The Schlieffen Plan: Critique of a Myth, tr. by Andrew and Eva Wilson (London: O. Wolff, 1958).

The potential value of the British Army to the French was never seriously questioned during Joffre's time as Chief of the French General Staff. In the period 1911-1914, all those who viewed the British Army at close quarters, French liaison officers, officers on tour, and Staff officers attending annual manoeuvres, were unanimously of the opinion that the small professional British force, profiting from the experiences of the South African War and the 1907 reforms, had become a well-officered, well-trained, efficient, modern army.[133] The BEF would thus be a substantial reinforcement to the French Army. The question of effectives had indeed become a serious concern for the French, both the Three Year Law and the tightening of the Russian Alliance, as noted, having been inspired by considerations of numbers. The small British Army added to the French Army, and with allowances being made for the addition of l'Armée Noire (colonial army) and the effect of a Russian diversion, would, in Joffre's words, "procure a marked numerical superiority" over the German Army on the western front.[134] In presenting Plan XVII to the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre in 1913, Joffre reaffirmed that the British Expeditionary Force of six infantry and one cavalry divisions "would be a very important reinforcement to [the French] armies operating on the northeast frontier."[135]

---

[132] See Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 212-13, 217-18.

[133] Prestwich, French Attitudes, pp. 296-97. Foch, returning from the 1912 manoeuvres, claimed it was "one of the best armies in existence." (Ibid.)

The participation of the British Force, moreover, would serve to strengthen French morale. The very fact that the British had not stood aloof as in 1870 would encourage the nation and spur on the French soldier.[136] Nor were Joffre and his key advisers oblivious to the long range military value of the British Army. Joffre, for one, apparently realized, albeit rather dimly, that the war might last up to six months.[137] "The French," to quote Williamson, "regarded British intervention as a form of insurance, useful at a war's outbreak, imperative if the war was prolonged."[138]

The chief difficulty for the French Staff after 1911 was to determine, in view of the uncertainties of British defence policy, if the BEF could be relied upon to come at all, and, if so, on time and in sufficient strength to play a role in the first great and decisive battles of the war. Although the French General Staff had come to believe in September, 1911, on the basis of Wilson's assurances, that immediate British participation was assured, more cautious counsels would soon prevail. Poincaré, the new Prime Minister in 1912, hard-headed realist that he was, was cautioned by the President of the Republic, Armand Fallières, to place confidence only in written treaties. Poincaré's unsuccessful attempt to bind the British in a written accord in 1912 provided further evidence for his lack of complete confidence in ultimate British assistance.[139] Presumably, in view of the close relationship between Government and General Staff, those words of caution were also passed on to General Joffre.

---

[134] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 121.

[135] Quoted in Prestwich, French Attitudes, p. 315.

[136] Prestwich, French Attitudes, pp. 317-18; Messimy, [Minister of War] to La Panouse, Military Attaché, London, August 9, 1914, AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 140.

[137] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 123-24.

[138] Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, p. 226; cf. Commander-in-Chief to the President of the Republic, August 9, 1914, AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 124.

Indeed, the reports of military attachés and other visitors to the British Army presented a wide range of opinion as to the likelihood of British support; all reflected the uncertainties of the situation. The British Government had clearly indicated that any decision to make war was dependent upon public opinion during the crisis period. Those who grappled seriously with the problem of British public opinion, Foch after his visit to the 1912 manoeuvres and Huguet in early 1913, were convinced that while ultimate British military support was likely, the time necessary for consolidation of public opinion in time of crisis might cause delay in the sending of the Expeditionary Force and thus prevent it from playing a major role in the first decisive battles.[140] Neither appreciated the rapidity with which British opinion might crystallize in event of German violation of neutral Belgium.

---

[139] Poincaré, Au service, I, 184-86.

[140] Prestwich, French Attitudes, pp. 306-12.

Faced with continued uncertainty about British intentions, the French Staff by the spring of 1912 had come to regard British intervention "only as a possible eventuality"[141] and thus discounted the likelihood of British support in its preparation of the new war plan, the definitive Plan XVII. The Committee of the General Staff set up in 1912 to develop the new plan noted that in the event of a German attack through Belgium, the French must be prepared to get by on their own, for British cooperation, although desirable, might be lacking. Thus, unlike variant 1 of Plan XVI, instituted by Joffre in 1911, the new Plan did not assume British participation in the opening battles of the war.[142]

Although the old forward concentration zone for the BEF on the French left flank was maintained, the utilization of British forces under Plan XVII was thus an embellishment rather than an essential part of the Plan. In defending the new Plan before the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre on April 19, 1913, Joffre pointed out that although British commercial interests would probably compel effective naval support, the British had not been willing to give any written commitment of military assistance. As "some very sensible people in Britain" were opposed to the dispatch of the entire Force of six infantry divisions and one cavalry division, "we shall act prudently," he concluded, "in not taking British forces into account in our operational plans."[143]

---

[141] "Report to the President of the Republic on the eventual cooperation of the military forces of Great Britain in the operations of our northeastern armies, March 1912," France, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Commission pour la publication des documents relatifs aux origines de la guerre de 1914-1918, Documents diplomatiques français (1871-1914) (41 vols.; Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1929-1959), 3e Série, II, no. 272 (hereinafter cited as DDF).

[142] Prestwich, French Attitudes, pp. 314-15; Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, p. 222.

Wilson still believed the Germans would advance across Belgium below the Meuse and that the BEF would be called upon to join up with the French left wing in the Belgian Ardennes for an attack on the German flank. But the French Staff never bothered under Plan XVII to draw up a written plan of campaign for the BEF, perhaps for reasons of secrecy as Joffre later claimed, but more probably because of the problematic nature of British intervention which, in Joffre's words, "could just as well never occur."[144] Joffre nonetheless kept open the option of an Anglo-French advance into Belgium should diplomatic conditions prove favourable.[145] Implicit in the continued arrangements for the forward deployment of the BEF, in fact, was the belief that in the event of British intervention, British mobilization would be simultaneous with that of the French and lead to an automatic dispatch of the Force. The French Staff, in maintaining this hope, appears to have relied on Wilson's assurances based on his assessment of the British political scene, despite the warnings by Foch and Huguet that the British decision for war would depend on British public opinion and that dispatch of the BEF might be delayed.[146] Even the few days delay which ultimately occurred in the dispatch of the Force following the British decision for war were wholly unanticipated by the French and became the subject of serious recrimination when French plans of attack had to be adjusted accordingly.

---

[143] Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 314-15, 222, 226.

[144] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 156; Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, p. 316; Maréchal Joseph J. C. Joffre, La préparation de la guerre et la conduite des opérations (Paris: Editions et Librairie E. Chiron, 1920), p. 21.

[145] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 155-56.

[146] Major-General Sir Edward Spears, Liaison, 1914: A Narrative of the Great Retreat (2nd ed.; London: Eyre & Spotteswordе, 1968), p. 13; Huguet, Britain and the War, p. 23. Both Henry Wilson and Sir John French affirmed at the British War Council of August 5, 1914, the French expectation that mobilization of the two Forces would be simultaneous. (Secretary's notes of a War Council held at 10 Downing Street, August

Plan XVII, moreover, failed to provide for one important contingency, a wide sweep of German forces across Belgium above the Meuse. Joffre and his Staff, acting on the assumption that the Germans would not use their reserves in the front lines, did not take this danger seriously. However, in the unlikely event of a wider German movement through Belgium, the British, they postulated, would be drawn into the conflict because of the threat to Antwerp. "In this case," Joffre later wrote, "I had the right to envisage the cooperation of the Belgians and the English."[147] Joffre thus saw British intervention mainly as a form of insurance, a kind of contingency plan, drawn up to meet a variety of contingencies.

The apparent wisdom of Joffre and his Staff in assuming a cautious attitude toward British participation in view of the uncertainties of British defence policy was soon borne out by events. In Great Britain, the danger of invasion, a perennial concern, to which British public opinion was overly sensitive, came to the fore in 1913 with a new invasion scare. As the Territorial Force, still 50,000 below authorized strength in 1912, lacked equipment, training and qualified officers,[148] the Committee of Imperial Defence decided in May 1914 that

---

5, 1914, Public Record Office, Cabinet Papers (hereinafter cited as PRO, Cab), 42/1/2.

[147] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 138-39.

[148] Prestwich, French Attitudes, pp. 303-06; Williamson, Politics

two of the six infantry divisions of the Expeditionary Force must remain at home to meet the danger. Wilson, however, managed to persuade Asquith, in private conversation, that five rather than four divisions of the six-division BEF could safely be dispatched to Europe.[149]

An equally serious threat to the dispatch of the Expeditionary Force centred on the Irish Question which reached crisis proportions in the spring of 1914 when 58 officers of the Cavalry Brigade at Curragh offered their resignation rather than impose the Government's policy of Irish Home Rule (soon to pass into law) on Ulster. The question was a particularly sensitive matter to Anglo-Irish officers, a large portion of the British officer corps, and developed into a full-blown political-military crisis when the dissidents received the support of high-ranking military leaders, among them Wilson, Sir John French, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, and his Adjutant-General, Sir Spencer Ewart. While French, Ewart and J. E. B. Seeley, the Secretary of State for War, resigned, Wilson retained his post but intrigued with the opposition and the press to force the Government's hand.[150] This indiscretion rendered him persona non grata with the Asquith Government, posing serious problems at a later date for Anglo-French military cooperation. The chief concern for the French, however, was that further embroilment of the Army in Ireland, where it already served as a police force,

---

of Grand Strategy, pp. 304-10. In an invasion, 70,000 men might get ashore, it was asserted, despite British mastery of the Seas. (Ibid.)

[149] Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 310-11.

[150] Callwell, Wilson, I, 137-46; Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 310, 334. For further on the Curragh incident, see Sir James Fergusson, The Curragh Incident (London: Faber and Faber, 1964) and A. P. Ryan, Mutiny at Curragh (London: Macmillan, 1956).

would limit its availability for action on the continent, while the shake-up in its top leadership threatened its cohesion and morale.[151]

The twin challenges to the dispatch of the Force, fear of invasion and internal unrest, thus made the size of the force available for continental intervention an "open question," even in the event of British participation.[152] British participation, moreover, was all the more uncertain as British public opinion, the dominant force in British as in French public life, was "deeply hostile to the whole military concept of any military involvement on the continent" in the prewar period.[153] The chief fault of the French planning was not overreliance on the British but to have planned so badly for the danger of a wide German sweep through Belgium that the British Expeditionary Force, assembled in a contingency role, would be obliged to fill the most vital role of all in defence of the French left flank.

The failure of the French Staff to provide for adequate defence of the Franco-Belgian frontier stemmed at least as much from French commitment to the offensive and a related error regarding German capabilities as the strictures of French foreign policy. The diplomatic situation obviously had a profound impact on the elaboration of Plan XVII. The arrangements with Russia and the neutrality of Italy, by restoring numerical equality on the western front, indeed facilitated an immediate offensive by French forces against Germany. The option of defensive-offensive strategy nonetheless remained open. Respect for

---

[151] Cf. Prestwich, French Attitudes, p. 316.

[152] See Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, p. 311.

[153] Howard, Continental Commitment, pp. 31, 53-54.

British interests, on the other hand, prevented an immediate offensive into Belgium; a defensive-offensive stance on that part of the front might have been envisaged. The French Staff's decision, moreover, to cast the BEF in a contingent role, seems, even in retrospect, a reasonable response to the uncertainty of British participation, but maintenance of its forward concentration zone reflected Joffre's unwavering commitment to offensive action. The flaws in Plan XVII thus derived not so much from the demands and uncertainties of British defence policy which, of course, imposed important restrictions, as from the French General Staff's fixation on the offensive and their inability to interpret the diplomatic situation in any other light.

Plan XVII, like its German counterpart, was in fact cut almost totally out of the fabric of the offensive. The advantages of the initiative emphasized in that doctrine and the prevailing belief that the war would be a short war of decisive battles prescribed preparation for immediate battle with all available forces. Determined to take the battle to the enemy in order to forestall invasion, Joffre's basic principle, as he later recorded, was "to go to battle with all his forces."[154] Enough flexibility was to be maintained in the concentration plan nonetheless to counter alternate manoeuvres on the part of the enemy.[155]

Because the concentration plan of mass armies, in addition to covering the country against invasion, must prepare the intended manoeuvre against the enemy, Joffre considered the possibilities for his offensive. Belgium being unavailable, his ultimate plan was to launch offensives by the most suitable military corridors into Germany. Two offensives in Lorraine would head in the general direction of Saargemünd, one on either side of the marshy region. The advance on the left would join with a third offensive through the Luxembourg (and possibly Belgian) Ardennes to form a pincer on the fortified Metz-Thionville region.[156] A mediocre operational plan, it was unlikely, at best, to produce decisive results because of the terrain and limited nature of the objective.[157] Metz, after all, is a long way from Berlin!

---

[154] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 142-43; cf. Philip M. Flammer, "The Schlieffen Plan and Plan XVII: A Short Critique," Military Affairs, XXX (1966), 207-12.

[155] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 143-45. See Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 220, 224.

The new concentration plan, Plan XVII, designed to facilitate these operations, was substantially the old variant number 1 to Plan XVI. The new plan aligned five (instead of six) armies along the frontier from Belfort to slightly north of Mézières, with the First, Second and Third Armies forward from Belfort to Briey and the Fifth Army forward on the left between Briey and Hirson. The Fourth Army was retained at Bar-Le-Duc in the rear, capable of reinforcement of either of the prongs of the intended pincer movement on the Metz-Thionville region. On the right and left of the entire disposition were a group of reserve divisions intended to meet the danger of a German flank movement through either Switzerland or Belgium.[158] Demonstrating the fixation of the French Staff on the Franco-German border as the area for hostilities, as in 1870, with possibly only a narrow violation of Belgian territory, the Plan in no way responded to the hypothesis of a wide German sweep

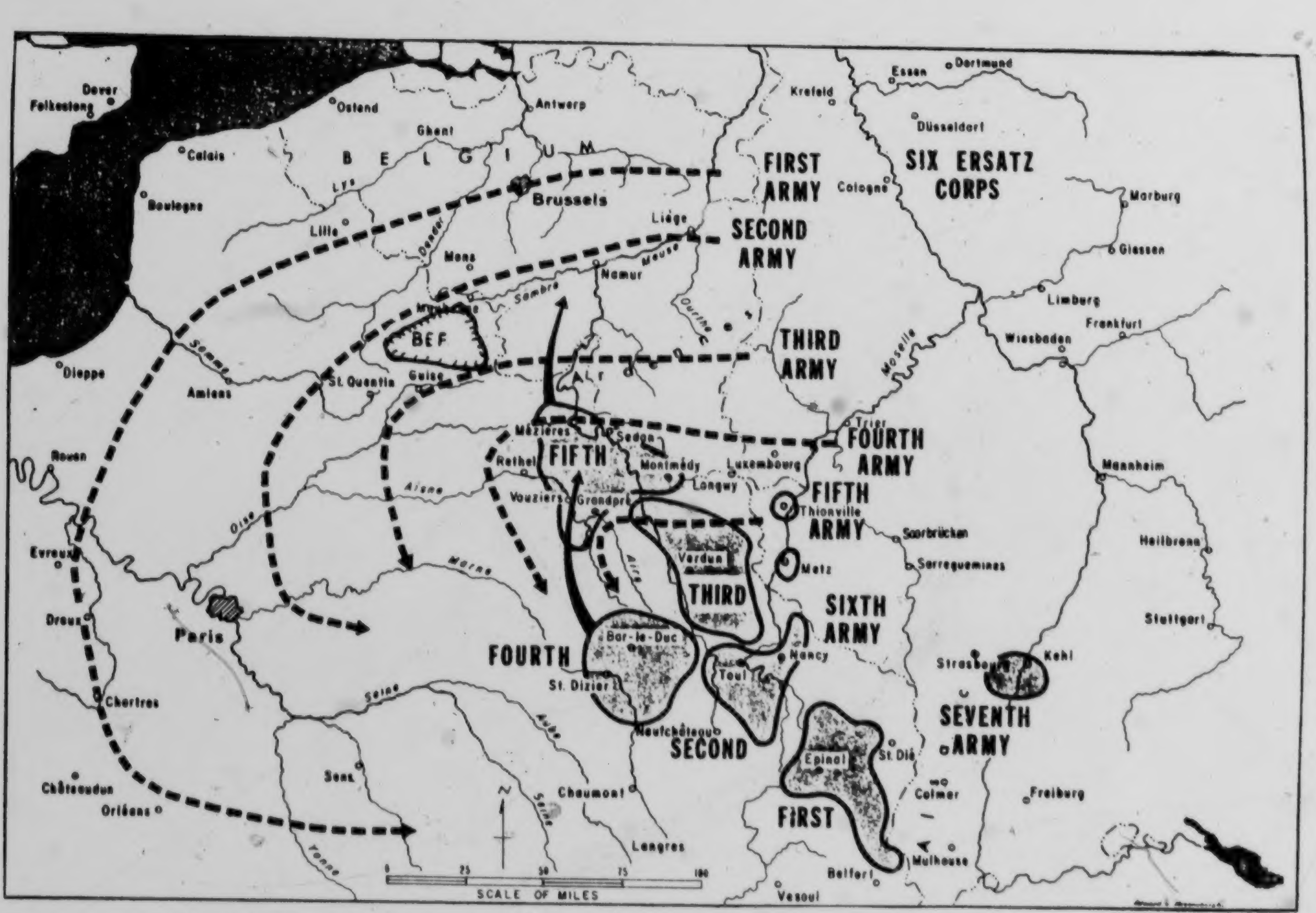
---

[156] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 150-54; Desmazes, Joffre, p. 75.

[157] Cf. Alexandre, Avec Joffre, p. 107.

[158] AFGG, I(I), Maps #8, 9; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 154-55. See Map #1, p. 57.

Map #1: Plan XVII and Schlieffen Plan


Dover
Folkestone
Ostend
Calais
Boulogne
Dieppe
Rouen
Evreux
Dreux
Chartres
Châteaudun
Orléans
Paris
Amiens
St. Quentin
Guise
Lille
Mons
Ghent
Antwerp
Brussels
B E L G I U M
Namur
Liège
Sambre
Meuse
Ourthe
Somme
Oise
Aisne
Marne
Seine
Aube
Yonne
Sens
Chaumont
Langres
BEF
Mézières
Sedan
Rethel
Vouziers
Grandpré
Montmédy
Longwy
Luxembourg
Aire
Verdun
Bar-le-Duc
St. Dizier
Toul
Nancy
Neufchâteau
Epinal
St. Dié
Colmar
Mulhouse
Belfort
Vesoul
Thionville
Metz
Saarbrücken
Sarreguemines
Trier
Moselle
Strasbourg
Kehl
Freiburg
Stuttgart
Heilbronn
Mannheim
Wiesbaden
Frankfurt
Limburg
Giessen
Marburg
Cologne
Krefeld
Düsseldorf
Essen
Dortmund
FIRST ARMY
SECOND ARMY
THIRD ARMY
FOURTH ARMY
FIFTH ARMY
SIXTH ARMY
SEVENTH ARMY
SIX ERSATZ CORPS
FIFTH
THIRD
FOURTH
SECOND
FIRST
N
0 25 50 75 100
SCALE OF MILES

Adapted from Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 225, 315.

through Belgium.[159]

The scant regard given to defence of northern France by the extension of French forces to only slightly beyond Mézières stemmed, in part, from erroneous concepts associated with offensive thought. Regard for British sensitivities having blocked an immediate offensive across Belgium, the General Staff unwisely decided against deploying a substantial force opposite the Belgian border to parry a German threat across neutral territory. Isolated from the main French offensives in Lorraine and the Belgian Ardennes, such a force, it was argued, would arrive too late in the Ardennes to be of any use in the first great battles.[160] The French Staff reasoned, moreover, that in the unlikely event of a wide German swing through Belgium, the German centre in Lorraine would be weakened and result in French victories there which in turn would ultimately draw forces from the German right.[161] That line of reasoning was not totally barren, for the threat of massive attacks in Lorraine did attract six new German divisions from Metz in the early days of the war, drawing from the potential strength of the

---

[159] Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 120-21; cf. Contamine, La revanche, pp. 162-63.

[160] See Joffre, Mémoires, I, 156-57.

[161] See Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 128, 220; Général Berthelot, "Souvenirs de la Grande Guerre. Notes extraites de mon Journal de Guerre, I: Au Grand Quartier Général. La Guerre de Mouvement de la déclaration de guerre au 24 novembre 1914" (unpublished typescript held by the General's nephew, Jean-Claude Dubois, Cressely, St. Remy-les-Chevreuses, France), entry of August 18, 1914, pp. 42-43. (Hereinafter cited as Berthelot, Diary, I.) According to Dubois, Berthelot, who was aide-major-général during the "War of Movement," made an accurate reproduction of the original diary in this manuscript intended for publication only twenty years after the author's death. This is a very valuable source.

German right.[162] It failed to come to grips, however, with the immediate danger for French forces of being seriously outflanked.

The French Staff in fact blithely anticipated little danger from a wide German sweep through Belgium. That self-assurance was based on a most serious error, still the subject of controversy. French military intelligence, it has been asserted, was defective and thus did not sufficiently alert the General Staff to the full dangers of the German war plan[163] which would send four strong armies crashing through Belgium in a vast encircling arc aimed at enveloping Paris and outflanking the French Army. On the other hand, it has been shown that French military intelligence had full knowledge of the German plan several years before the war and even knew that German reserves would be used to make possible a wide German sweep across Belgium.[164] The question, as in the case of all intelligence information, was to what extent such information could be relied upon. Even in the face of uncertainty as to the ultimate meaning of intelligence reports passed to it, however, the General Staff ought to have been inspired to caution.

In his Mémoires Joffre frankly admits that he and his Staff did not take the information from military intelligence seriously, although some of it, such as the density of German railways on the Belgian border, was very concrete. Rather, the French Staff erroneously applied its own reasoning based on offensive thought to the Germans. Not taking into account the superior officer cadre and greater quantity of heavy artillery of German reserves, the French Staff concluded that German reserve units would not be capable of immediate offensive action. As a result, the maximum extension possible of the German right across Belgium would be to the Meuse, for which the French plan, by providing for the insertion of an army in that part of the line, made adequate provision.[165] The French Command was wholly surprised in August 1914 to find two strong armies beyond their extreme left as a result of the German use of thirteen reserve corps for offensive operations.[166]

---

[162] See Koeltz, La guerre de 1914-1918, pp. 69-70.

[163] See Desmazes, Joffre, pp. 80-81 and footnotes; Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 220-21.

[164] AFGG, I(I), pp. 38-39; Desmazes, Joffre, pp. 80-81; Contamine, La revanche, pp. 104, 162-63; Koeltz, La guerre de 1914-1918, pp. 60-61; Berthelot, Diary, I, A54-55.

The ultimate responsibility for Plan XVII, if not its authorship, rests with Joffre. Its chief architect was Castelnau, who participated in all the studies leading to the Plan and was "one of the principal artisans."[167] Had Joffre received better advice, the plan might have had fewer defects. Ultimately, however, a chief must assume responsibility for the quality of advice of his subordinates. The truth is that so far as strategy was concerned, Joffre was very poorly qualified by his background and training to discern the value of advice received from his Staff. Plan XVII reflects that lack of qualification and discernment.

Plan XVII was indeed a defective plan. Drawn up by a committee, defended by Joffre before the War Minister and future army commanders in the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre (War Board) in April, 1913, and operational just over a year later,[168] it embodied all the risks of an a priori offensive without adequate reconnaissance to lift the "fog of war." Without proper surveillance to determine the strength and location of the enemy, such an offensive could result in futile and bloody assaults against a foe either numerically superior or in a highly defensible position, as in the case of the Lorraine offensive, while at the same time exposing one's own force to an enemy thrust elsewhere.[169] The commitment to a preconceived offensive resulted in a fundamental strategic error, neglect of the principle of security--in this case, not only the security of the French Army but the safety of the richest industrial area in France and of the Capital itself.[170] The result of that error was the "Great Retreat" which need not have occurred had the French plan provided for the insertion of a strong army north of Mézières and had fortification of the region not been neglected.[171] Fortunately for the French, the principle of manoeuvre was also one of the key ingredients of offensive thought.[172] But only by a vast and dangerous rearward manoeuvre and the clever use of railways were they able to overcome on the Marne the dire consequences of an initially defective plan.

---

[165] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 249-50; Desmazes, Joffre, pp. 80-81.

[166] See Desmazes, Joffre, p. 80; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 250.

[167] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 205.

[168] Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 220, 223; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 169.

Plan XVII had serious implications for British collaboration on the battlefield. While the British did not participate in the formation of the French war plan and were assigned only a contingent role in it, the French subjected them to extreme risks. Because the French Staff failed to consider the possibility of a wider German arc through Belgium, the miniscule British force of four and a half infantry and one cavalry divisions on the French left was exposed to the full weight of one and later two German armies.[173] The Plan thus assigned them by default a mission far in excess of their existing capacity. The result for Franco-British military relations was nearly total breakdown of Allied cooperation in the face of a desperate strategic situation.

---

[169] Cf. Flammer, "The Schlieffen Plan and Plan XVII," pp. 207-12.

[170] See Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, p. 226.

[171] On the neglect of fortifications, see Paul Cambon, French Ambassador in London, to Delcassé, Foreign Minister, 27 August, 1914, Delcassé Papers, Archives des Affaires Etrangères, Vol. III, pp. 326-28. (Archives des Affaires Etrangères hereinafter cited as AE.)

[172] Carrias, La pensée militaire, p. 354; Contamine, La revanche, pp. 162-63, 188.

Entente Military Relationships, Images and Staff Arrangements

The attitude of the French Staff toward the British Army was shaped significantly by the "glorious" historical tradition of the French Army. The French Army, heir to the legacy of Napoleon, enjoyed great prestige as the preserver and defender of the nation. In Great Britain the Royal Navy enjoyed that position of national affection and prestige; the Army, which was very small in comparison to continental armies, ran a poor second, as did the French Navy in France. The sense of military greatness harboured by the French meant that in their dealings with the small British Army the French Staff would assume a definite air of superiority and feel it their right to lead and direct.[174]

The vast disparity in the immediate military capabilities of the two Powers, moreover, established the French as the senior partner on land and reinforced the tendency of the French General Staff to dominate prewar Anglo-French councils. Inasmuch as France, who was prepared to field some seventy-two divisions, would be joined under favourable circumstances by only four to six British divisions,[175] it is understandable that the French Staff was decidedly unprepared to take the British into equal partnership in military planning. Thus, although there was some consultation with the British on various points, at no time in the prewar period, either in the formulation of variant 1 to Plan XVI or in the drafting of Plan XVII, did the French Staff draw up their plans jointly with the British; rather, the French made their plans, although not without reference to the demands of British policy, and then simply informed the British where they could best deploy their Forces.[176] During the war the French Command, asserting the leadership role, would follow the same pattern, drawing up their strategic plans essentially without consultation with the British and then asking the British to comply.

---

[173] Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, p. 222.

[174] Prestwich, French Attitudes, pp. 284-86.

Had the Entente been fully coordinated at the cabinet level in the prewar period, the vast superiority of the British Navy over the French Navy might have served as a lever for greater British input into military councils.[177] Such coordination, however, was completely lacking, and because of the French fixation on land warfare and the prevailing belief in a short war, the value of the British Navy in economic warfare against the enemy in the event of a long war was not fully appreciated in either political or military circles.[178] The most absurd appreciation of all was that made by Joffre and Castelnau in 1913, who agreed that the British Navy, except from the moral point of view, was not worth a single bayonet to the French.[179] The question, therefore, from the point of view of future military cooperation, was whether the British Command and the British Government, despite overall British equality within the coalition, would yield to the demands of French military leadership. Given British national pride and the need to defend vital British interests, serious conflict was bound to arise under certain circumstances.

---

[175] On the number of French divisions, see Koeltz, La Guerre de 1914-1918, p. 41.

[176] See Frederick Maurice, Lessons of Allied Cooperation: Naval, Military, and Air, 1914-1918 (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), p. 5; Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 124, 181-82, 209, 226.

[177] See Maurice, Lessons, p. 5.

[178] Ibid.; Prestwich, French Attitudes, pp. 334-35.

On the other hand, under the banner of friendship promoted by the two Governments since the beginning of the Entente Cordiale, Anglo-French military relations reached a high level of cordiality in certain areas in the immediate prewar period. A degree of confidence and trust in personal relations between major figures on each side was particularly important in providing the basis for a modicum of later collaboration. Allusion, of course, has already been made to the extremely cordial relations established between Wilson on one side and Foch, Joffre, Castelnau and Dubail on the other. Sir John French also, who would later command the BEF, was much esteemed by the French for his friendly sentiments toward them and visited military manoeuvres in France in 1908, 1911, and 1913.[180] Both he and his eventual successor as commander of the Force, Sir Douglas Haig, who also visited French manoeuvres in the summer of 1914, had established a very cordial relationship with Foch in the years just before the war.[181] Foch, for his part, visited English manoeuvres in 1912 and was followed by Castelnau in 1913. Joffre, too, whose association with the British had been mainly through Foch, Wilson and the military attachés, was slated to attend British manoeuvres in 1914, but the outbreak of war intervened.[182] His lack of personal acquaintances in the British Army except for Wilson was a distinct impediment; only after the accession of Foch, widely known and respected by the British, as effective coordinator of the northern theatre on October 4, 1914, was true cooperation finally achieved.

---

[179] Callwell, Wilson, I, 122.

[180] General [Victor Jacques Marie] Huguet, Britain and the War: A French Indictment, tr. by H. Cotton Minchin (London: Cassell and Co., 1928), p. 26; Prestwich, French Attitudes, p. 316; Callwell, Wilson, I, 127.

Lower level contacts were also significant. The two military attachés at London, Colonel Victor Huguet and Lieutenant-Colonel de la Panouse, enjoyed cordial relations and easy access to British military circles. Huguet, who later headed the French military mission at British Headquarters, was reputedly an admirer of all things British and enjoyed an especially close relationship with Wilson.[183] The numerous contacts between the two Staffs at all levels allowed each side to familiarize itself with the military establishment of the other, engendered a feeling of confidence and camaraderie and reduced traditional suspicions and prejudices. Wilson, moreover, was fully converted to French offensive thought; Sir John French, at least partially converted, providing some community of doctrine with the French.[184] The French Staff confided a great deal of highly confidential information to Wilson; Staff talks were almost continuous. A much greater personal confidence and trust in fact prevailed between the French and British Staffs than between the French and Russian Staffs, despite the non-committal nature of the British relationship and the binding relationship with the Russians.[185] That confidence, despite later difficulties, was one of the essential ingredients of the military Entente and made its later functioning possible.

---

[181] Letter, Douglas Haig to Foch, 10 July 1914, "Mal Douglas Haig" file, AFF; Letters of John French to Foch, 19 June 1913, 9 Jan. 1914, "Mal French" file, AFF.

[182] Huguet, Britain and the War, pp. 26-27.

[183] Prestwich, French Attitudes, p. 289 and n. 16; Messimy, Souvenirs, p. 282.

[184] See Messimy, Souvenirs, p. 316 and Prestwich, French Attitudes, p. 294; cf. Sixsmith, British Generalship, pp. 37ff.

The cordiality between French and British military authorities, nonetheless, was of recent origin. Despite a great effort made to foster good relations, the ten year old Entente could not entirely wipe out the fact that France's new friends were her old enemies. Six hundred years of bitter rivalry, which had seen the two powers on the brink of war as late as 1898 over colonial claims, could not be dissolved totally in a single decade. Under the veneer of cordiality which marked Anglo-French military relations in the immediate prewar period was a deep-seated distrust of British political motives which was likely to surface in time of difficulty. Indeed, the traditional anglophobic view of Great Britain as "perfidious Albion" who through deceit and manipulation juggled the continental balance to protect her interests without making any substantial contributions to either side was never far from the surface in military circles, even among devoted anglophiles.[186] Ferdinand Foch, for example, a close friend of Wilson, who in 1911 saw in the Entente Cordiale greater security for France than in the Russian alliance,[187] echoed this right-wing point of view in his report on the 1912 British manoeuvres. Great Britain, he predicted, because of her lack of a large army to defend her interests, would follow the policy of making agreements with continental powers with superior land forces, in order "to ask much of them and, on the day of reckoning, bring them little." **"The British respect us only because of our large army."**[188]

---

[185] Cairns, "International Politics and the Military Mind," p. 278; Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, p. 223.

[186] Cf. Prestwich, French Attitudes, p. 219. This French view of the hallowed British policy of balance of power was still evident among several middle class Frenchmen with whom I talked while in France in 1974-75.

Others were equally distrustful and suspicious. To the surprise of the British, Huguet, long considered a close friend of Britain, wrote a bitter indictment of British policy after the war in which he warned of the dangers for the French of British pursuit of "self-interest."[189] The other military attaché at London, de la Panouse, was much quicker to give vent to his suspicions. On August 19, 1914, he claimed that Kitchener's plan for the creation of a second army of 500,000 men reflected the desire of Great Britain to have a strong army at the peace settlement in the face of a weakened France and a strong Russia.[190] All of these personalities, influential in shaping British images prior to the war, would play even more influential roles during the war: Foch as co-ordinator of operations in the northern French theatre after October 4, 1914; Huguet as Head of the French Military Mission to the British Command; and de la Panouse, who continued as military attaché in London.

In addition, on Joffre's Staff during the war were influential persons with undiluted and distinct anglophobic sentiments, notably General Berthelot, Assistant Chief of Staff during the "War of Movement,"[191] and Major Maurice Gamelin, confidant of Joffre and his senior aide during the early months of the war.[192] Joffre, nonetheless, appears to have been less prejudiced toward the British than some of his associates, being of a pragmatic frame of mind and not having read much of the history of traditional Anglo-French rivalry in Europe. "The English," he remarked to the head of English Intelligence at the French Foreign Ministry, "used to be our enemies; now they are our good friends."[193]

---

[187] Callwell, Wilson, I, 88.

[188] Prestwich, French Attitudes, pp. 311-12.

[189] See Huguet, Britain and the War, pp. 209-11.

[190] De la Panouse to Ministre de la Guerre, 19 August, 1914, AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 93.

The images formed in the minds of French officers on the nature of British character during this period were also of considerable importance for future military relations. Both Foch in 1912 and Huguet in 1913, on the basis of their analyses of British public opinion and British temperament, formed the view that British intervention might well be delayed while the British, slow to see their interests, finally made up their minds. They thereby helped to shape the very important image of the British as "slow and late"[194] which, reinforced by the initial events of the war, would have a significant impact on Command relations in the field. The image of the British as stolid warriors, but better suited to defensive than offensive warfare, also derived from the French analysis of British character. According to Huguet, who, after ten years as military attaché in London, delivered an important lecture on the subject to the officers of the *Centre des Hautes Etudes Militaires* (Centre for Advanced Military Studies) in April, 1913, the British, highly insular by nature and very slow to change and adapt, were in fact of mediocre intelligence, without either much imagination or capacity to see into the future. On the other hand, they possessed a large fund of innate good sense, which often led them to adopt the right solution, and once set in a course, they possessed the will and tenacity to emerge "victorious from any challenge."[195] The British soldier, as a result, possessed remarkable qualities of perseverance, tenacity, confidence in his leaders and well-led could be a very valuable tool. He, however, was less intelligent and lacked the vital *élan* of the French infantryman which suited him so well for offensive warfare.[196] From this disparaging image of British character developed the grave doubts later entertained by the French Command on the capacity of the British Army to carry out a successful offensive, unless carefully sustained on either side by French forces. On the other hand, according to the French assessment, British tenacity would assure that the British, once committed to a cause at the political level, would see it through to victory. That assessment proved to be correct.

---

[191] See, for example, Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of November 16, 1914, pp. 232-33.

[192] Ibid., entry of August 5, 1914, p. 15; General M[aurice] Gamelin, Manoeuvre et victoire de la Marne (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1954), p. 134.

[193] Liddell Hart, Reputations, p. 30.

[194] Prestwich, French Attitudes, pp. 310-12.

French observers at British manoeuvres moreover were not without critical comment on the leadership of the British Force. From their observations, the British High Command seemed unfamiliar with the handling of large units and would probably show "hesitant movement and an indecisive manner" in warfare.[197] The British officer corps, on the other hand, a traditional preserve of the aristocracy, while the subject of some republican disapproval, seemed to French visitors more serious and better educated than in days past.[198] Conservative French officers, unaccustomed to live in the luxurious life style of the British aristocrat, nonetheless found in their British counterparts a life style they would have liked to enjoy, and a warm camaraderie.[199] The British concept of gentlemanly conduct, however, was hardly appreciated by the French, who, without apparent forethought, would continually offend the aristocratic British Command during the war by lack of frankness and directness in their relations.

---

[195] Prestwich, *French Attitudes*, p. 299; Huguet, *Britain and the War*, p. 3. The *Centre des Hautes Etudes Militaires* was a third year recently added to the *Ecole Supérieure de la Guerre* to give the final touches to the strategic training of French Staff officers. (Ralston, *Army of the Republic*, p. 331.)

[196] Prestwich, *French Attitudes*, p. 300.

The French General Staff, regardless of the doubts it may have harboured on the leadership ability or offensive capability of the small British force, recognized its substantial value as a crucial reinforcement to the French Army, providing the needed superiority against the enemy. Whatever the doubts as to the size of the Force, the date of its arrival, or its participation at all, the possibility of British intervention made joint staff arrangements worthwhile. Under the energetic impetus of Wilson, whose staff work was as good technically as his political views were unreliable, staff arrangements reached their ultimate form in March of 1913. These arrangements were in effect with only slight modifications when the war began.[200]

---

[197] Prestwich, French Attitudes, pp. 247-98.

[198] Ibid., pp. 300-01.

[199] Ibid., pp. 301-02.

By the terms of these arrangements, the British forces would land at Rouen, Le Havre, and Boulogne and move by rail to the staging area in the Maubeuge-Le Cateau-Hirson Triangle. According to schedule D, slightly amended later, the last of the six British divisions was to arrive in its zone of concentration by the sixteenth day of mobilization.[201] British Headquarters would be at Le Cateau. Detailed logistical arrangements were agreed upon and provision was made for communication between the Allied armies by the establishment of a special code "W" and the assignment of liaison officers down to brigade level.[202]

The great flaw in prewar staff talks was the failure to spell out in detail the all-important relationship to exist between commands. The assumption in verbal staff communication was that a British Admiral would command at sea and a French General would command on land, but nothing was ever put into writing to that effect.[203] The French Staff, reviewing the status of Anglo-French staff talks in March, 1912, specified that "coordination of the operations of the English Army with the French Armies of the North-East will be assured by directives emanating from the Commander-in-Chief of the French forces operating in this theatre and addressed to the Chief of the English troops." The most precise statement drawn up in the prewar period, it assumed full independence of the British Force.[204] The combination of French leadership and British independence, implicit in this vague verbal formula, was to prove the cause of much conflict during the war.

---

[200] Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 313-14.

[201] Ibid.; "Prévision de l'état-major de l'armée relative à la durée de la concentration 'W,'" n.d., AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 7.

[202] Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 314-16.

[203] CT #523, Paul Cambon, Ambassador at London, to French Minister of Foreign Affairs, March 23, 1915, AE, Série "Guerre 1914-1918," Vol. 535, p. 208.

As in the scenario of a great orchestral performance, many of the major themes of the later wartime relationships between the French Command and the British Command and Government were introduced in the prewar period. The Entente Cordiale, though not an ideal instrument for the preparation of a wartime coalition, provided the political and military framework for Allied cooperation in the event of war. The political-military structure elaborated in France after the Agadir crisis and the close relationship between French policy and strategy prefigured the unique power structure of the later coalition which would make Joffre effective master of Anglo-French strategy during the "War of Movement." Despite the controversy between the interventionists and "blue water" schools in Great Britain and the lack of support in public opinion for continental intervention, British acceptance of the strategy of intervention in 1911 and the close staff talks with the French in the prewar period provided the basis for the later dispatch of the BEF to France. Plan XVII, on the other hand, in conforming to the demands of British policy, avoided an offensive thrust across Belgium, but failed to provide against a wide German sweep across Belgium, thereby exposing the BEF to extreme danger on the French left flank. The initial failure of French strategy would later threaten the break-up of the coalition.

---

[204] "Report to the President of the Republic on the eventual cooperation of the military forces of Great Britain with the operations of our northeastern armies, March 1912," DDF, 3e Sér., II, no. 272. Cf. Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, p. 316. One is compelled to wonder, in examining Kitchener's orders to Sir John French (see below), if the former had any knowledge of even this verbal agreement.

While staff talks provided for the concentration of the BEF, they failed to provide for a specific definition of the future command relationship, a serious omission. Following the prewar pattern, Joffre, of course, would seek to obtain a maximum participation from the British, but under French direction and leadership. The British would not always agree. While prewar relationships between prominent military personalities provided the basis for at least a modicum of wartime cooperation, long-term mistrust and suspicions persisted to cause much difficulty in time of stress on the field of battle. The powerful images of the British as slow, late and unaggressive would also have a significant impact on future command relations. The main outlines of Allied relationships during the war were thus at least partially discernable in the prewar period.

CHAPTER II

POPULAR POLITICS, GOVERNMENTS AND HIGH COMMANDS

AUGUST - NOVEMBER, 1914

The advent of war in August, 1914, was taken as the signal in France and Great Britain, as in all belligerent nations, for the legislature to strengthen the power of the executive in order to provide for effective prosecution of the short war envisaged.[1] Legislative deference to executive power had its origin in public opinion which in both countries was prepared to ignore old political and social issues in favour of a united war effort.[2] The major difference between French and British political adjustment to the war was that the French Cabinet in turn delegated much of the vast authority vested in it to the French High Command. In Great Britain, the Cabinet resolutely retained power which was effectively exercised by the Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener, while the prerogatives of the Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force were narrowly circumscribed. Because these political-military power relationships were based on a broad political consensus, they remained substantially unaltered during the "War of Movement."

Out of these differing power relationships developed many of the unique aspects of the coalition.[3] Civil-military conflict, which in the French case later developed from the excessive powers conferred upon the Commander-in-Chief and dissatisfaction with the results obtained during the "War of Movement" and subsequent battles,[4] was pronounced in the British case from the beginning. Pursuing an operational strategy on French lines, Sir John French, the Commander of the British Expedition, was prepared to side with the French against Kitchener on matters of policy and grand strategy that would detract from his immediate operations. Kitchener, on the other hand, could be relied upon by the French Command, because of his commitment to cooperation with the French, to impose French will on Sir John whenever a dispute arose between commands. In both instances, division in British councils would enhance French strategic domination of the coalition.

---

[1] See Pierre Renouvin, Peuples et civilisations, Vol. XIX: La crise européenne et la première guerre mondiale (3rd ed.; Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948), pp. 216-19.

[2] See, for example, Arno J. Mayer, Political Origins of the New Diplomacy, 1917-1918 (New York: Howard Fertig, 1969), pp. 1-14.

The French Government and High Command

At the outset of war, Joffre received a sweeping mandate of power from his Government. Anchored in public opinion and based on a broad political consensus, this extensive grant of powers was not seriously questioned until the beginning of parliamentary investigation and inspection in January, 1915.[5]

In the prewar period some guidelines had already been established to govern the relationship between government and command in time of war. Responding to the same nationalistic fervour which had led to greatly increasing the authority of the Chief of the General Staff over the Army in peacetime, the French Government granted in the prewar period even wider prerogatives for the conduct of operations in wartime. To fight the short war of movement on land universally envisaged, full liberty of action would be required by the commanding general. MacMahon's failure at Sedan in 1870, it was commonly held, was the consequence of undue government interference in operations. In a short war, moreover, granting wide powers to the general(s)-in-chief would entail few political risks. War Minister Etienne thus prepared decrees in October and December, 1913, which, envisaging a multi-theatre war, gave the commander of each theatre "full disposition" of the forces at his disposal, while the Government retained the right to set political objectives and allocate resources. These arrangements also conferred upon each commander dictatorial military rule within the army zone, which, however, it was assumed would be largely in enemy territory.[6] The intention, of course, was to maintain civilian supremacy, but the absence of a second theatre of war, the result of Italian neutrality, would, under these arrangements, greatly enhance the power of the Commander-in-Chief on the western front.[7]

---

[3] See Paul Guinn, British Strategy and Politics, 1914-1918 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), for an account of the relationship between British policy and grand strategy during the war.

[4] See King, Generals and Politicians, for a full account of French civil-military conflict during the war.

[5] See Ibid., pp. 36ff.

The parliamentarians, for their part, had decided as early as 1905 that mobilizable deputies would become soldiers in the event of war. This meant the virtual cessation of parliamentary activity, and in consequence a wide delegation of authority to the Cabinet for the prosecution of the war. Most deputies agreed that for the short war anticipated, the Legislature, in order to avoid the divisive process of parliamentary discussion, ought to defer to the Executive, which in turn would give a wide grant of powers to the High Command for the conduct of operations.[8] As Radical deputy André Hesse declared in 1911, echoing the dominant feeling in the Chamber, "When the guns begin to speak, it is best that the politicians keep quiet."[9]

---

[6] See Pierre Renouvin, Les formes du gouvernement de guerre (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1925), pp. 16-17; King, Generals and Politicians, p. 18.

[7] Renouvin, Formes du gouvernement, p. 77; Maréchal Franchet d'Esperey, "Notes sur la conduite supérieure de la guerre de 1792 à 1797 et de 1914 à 1918," Revue militaire générale, 2e série, II (1-6, 1938), 140; Messimy, Souvenirs, pp. 230-31; King, Generals and Politicians, pp. 15-16.

The outbreak of war, which gave rise to tremendous bursts of patriotism, produced a further exaggeration of these prewar tendencies. Adolphe Messimy, again War Minister since June 14, 1914, was, as noted, an advocate of strong military leadership. On August 2, the day after general mobilization had been proclaimed, Messimy on behalf of the Government "gave to the commander-in-chief absolute liberty of action for the execution of his plans."[10] An understanding worked out between Messimy and Joffre and approved by the Cabinet at this time further sealed the quasi-eclipse of the Government before the High Command. "The political direction of the war properly belongs to the Government," it asserted; "the conduct of operations is under the exclusive purview of the Commander-in-Chief."[11]

On the surface, Messimy's formula maintained the dominance of political over military authority while granting wide-ranging authority to Joffre over the conduct of operations. As such it appeared well suited to the requirements of a short war. But the absence of a second theatre snatched from the Government's purview the enormous power of arbiter of resources between several fronts which of necessity would have involved supervision of operations. Moreover, with the departure of almost all the prewar General Staff into the field, the consequence of having abolished in 1912 the residual General Staff of the Army, which was to have remained behind after mobilization, the Government was left without impartial expert advice or even effective means of monitoring information and advice from the High Command.[12] The Government, of course, was fully in harmony with the political aims of the French Command which were to drive out the Germans and obtain a maximum participation from the Allies of France. The Government's role in directing policy thus paled into insignificance before the all-important and immediate need to obtain operational success, the task of Joffre and his associates.

---

[8] Renouvin, Formes du gouvernement, pp. 21-22; King, Generals and Politicians, pp. 15-16, 17-18.

[9] Ralston, Army of the Republic, p. 329.

[10] King, Generals and Politicians, p. 15.

[11] Messimy, Souvenirs, pp. 232-33; cf. King, Generals and Politicians, pp. 15-16. Neither gives the exact date of this guideline.

Public opinion, in fact, was unanimously enthusiastic about an energetic prosecution of the war effort. The Chamber, the true seat of power in the normal peace-time working of the Third Republic, in consequence fully endorsed the concentration of power in the hands of the Cabinet and the High Command. Rallying to Poincaré's call for a *union sac[illegible]e* (national union), even the Socialists, despite their long-term internationalism, demonstrated their patriotism along with all other groups during the historic one-day parliamentary session of August 4, 1914. During one afternoon, eighteen measures were passed into law without debate, giving the Cabinet extensive powers for the direction of the war, including the right to suspend freedom of the press and to spend and borrow without legislative approval. The Chamber thus signified its tacit approval of the vast powers already conferred upon the General-in-Chief. The session came to an end with cries of Vive la France!, Vive la République!, Vive l'Alsace!, and one-third of the Deputies trooped off to war with the lighthearted assurance that when the Chamber and Senate reconvened in January, the whole episode would be over.[13]

---

[12] Renouvin, *Formes du gouvernement*, p. 77; Franchet d'Esperey, "La conduite supérieure de la guerre," p. 140.

The political consensus of the nation had thus been formed in support of the war. Prepared to adjourn all issues of reform and social change, the Left joined the Right for the sole purpose of winning the war. That consensus was in sharp contrast to the marked divisions within the country at the outset of war in 1939, and allowed the High Command a wide range of discretion for a lengthy period in the earlier situation, until the national consensus was shattered by the bloodletting at Verdun and the Somme in 1916.[14]

Jealous of his powers as Commander-in-Chief of the Armies of the Northeast, Joffre exercised them to the full, often punctuating his demands with the threat of resignation. Partially out of conviction, partially out of weakness, the Viviani Government made but infrequent demands upon Joffre during the first months of the war.[15] A request for more information which was initiated by Poincaré, one of the few willing to stand up to the massive General, after the Morhange defeat of August 20, led to the appointment of two liaison officers between Government and Staff to forward information on the course of operations.[16] Upset by the approach of the German armies after the defeat of the "Battle of the Frontiers," Messimy, on behalf of the Government, ordered Joffre on August 25 to defend the Capital with an army of at least three active corps--a significant government intervention which led the General to complain bitterly about government interverence in operations.[17] When Anglo-French military cooperation reached its lowest ebb, on September 1, Millerand, who replaced Messimy on August 27, advised Joffre to "establish a more intimate cooperation" with the British Commander-in-Chief.[18] Poincaré, in addition, reasserted his right to visit the front in early October, 1914.[19] But apart from these sporadic and sometimes significant demands, the Government gave Joffre a completely free hand in the operational conduct of the war.

---

[13] King, Generals and Politicians, pp. 13-21, 39; Chastenet, Troisième République, IV, 183; Renouvin, La crise européenne, p. 218. For two accounts of the wartime mobilization of public opinion by government propaganda, see Harold D. Lasswell, Propaganda Technique in the World War (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner Co., 1927) and Bruntz, Allied Propaganda and the Collapse of the German Empire.

[14] See Mayer, Political Origins of the New Diplomacy, p. 5; King, Generals and Politicians, p. 139ff.

[15] See King, Generals and Politicians, pp. 13-16, 21-35 for a detailed account of Joffre's relationship to his Government from the end of July to December, 1914. See also Messimy, Souvenirs, pp. 229-65.

The defeat in the "Battle of the Frontiers" on August 23, followed by the retreat of the French Armies, brought Viviani's Government under serious pressure due to criticism from the Socialists of Joffre's conduct of operations.[20] The political consensus recently formed and the loyal support of the Government, however, unlike in the case of Maurice Gamelin in 1940, prevented his replacement. Rather, the Cabinet, under Poincaré's urging, was enlarged on August 27 to obtain the support of the Left and give effective voice to the principle of *union sacrée* enunciated at the beginning of the war. Jules Guesde and Marcel Sembat, two prominent Socialists, entered the Ministry for the first time; Messimy was replaced at the War Ministry by Millerand who had served in that capacity in Poincaré's famous 1912 ministry; and Delcassé was returned as Foreign Minister.[21] "With Millerand at the War Ministry and Ribot at Finances," wrote Paul Cambon from London, "it will no longer be possible to call it a 'ministry of incompetents.'"[22]

---

[16] Poincaré, Au service, V, 142-43; King, Generals and Politicians, p. 26.

[17] King, Generals and Politicians, p. 27.

[18] Personal Letter of Millerand to Joffre, 1/9-14, Archives de Guerre, Vincennes (hereinafter cited as AG), Fonds Buat 6N7, File: "Ordres généraux du G. Q. G.," September 1914 (reproduced in AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1774).

[19] King, Generals and Politicians, p. 34.

[20] Messimy, Souvenirs, p. 234; cf. Poincaré Papers, XXXVI, XXXVII,

In Millerand, the High Command found a willing advocate, which further strengthened Joffre's position. A stronger man than Messimy,[23] he tenaciously shared the former's conviction that the General-in-Chief should have full liberty of action in the preparation and conduct of operations.[24] Millerand firmly held the view that it was the War Minister's duty to represent the Commander-in-Chief before the Government and Parliament and to shield him with his own authority. Holding at bay

---

"Notes Journalières," March - August, September - December, 1914, Bibliothèque Nationale (hereinafter cited as *BN*), NAF (16027), entry of September 1, 1914, p. 273, NAF (16028), entry of September 1, 1914, p. 2; Poincaré, *Au service*, V, 226, 251-53.

[21] King, *Generals and Politicians*, p. 27; Poincaré, *Au service*, V, 168-84.

[22] Private letter of Paul Cambon to Delcassé, 27 August, 1914, Delcassé Papers, *AE*, Vol. 3, pp. 326-28.

[23] King, *Generals and Politicians*, p. 26; Herbillon, *Souvenirs*, I, 13-14.

[24] Private letter, Millerand to Kitchener, 30 May 1915, Millerand Papers, *BN*, Carton #20 (uncatalogued at date of consultation).

Joffre's critics, he defended the prerogatives of the High Command while responding energetically to the munition shortage which developed in early October, 1914, and thus contributed to the already vast powers of the General-in-Chief.[25]

The precipitous flight of the Government from Paris to Bordeaux on September 3, 1914, moreover, diminished the prestige of the Government which, suffering from a badly tarnished image in the media, became the nub of popular jokes. At the same time, personal fame came to Joffre as the "Victor of the Marne." Almost from the outset Joffre had acquired effective control of the press and other agencies of public opinion by the Cabinet's decision on August 5 to forbid the printing of news harmful to the morale of the army and to allow the press to print only the official news of operations provided by the High Command. Now, as a popular hero with vast support in public opinion, "Papa" Joffre became politically untouchable, elevated beyond criticism.[26] The Government was thus obliged to treat with the greatest deference this new-found savior who commanded more popular support than did they.

The net result of these factors was that during the early months of the war, the French Government exercised very little control over the High Command. The French Command, entrusted with defence of the national territory, exercised nearly full authority in the formulation and execution of French strategy. The Government, responsible for the direction of policy, played only a nominal and supportive role. This was especially true with regard to relations with the British. Only on a single occasion, as noted, did Joffre receive direction on his relationship with the British Command. At all other times, the Government, in full harmony with his aim of getting full participation from the British, hastened to add its weight to whatever he requested from them. The French Government thus became the mouthpiece of the High Command for obtaining their wishes from the British.

---

[25] Messimy, Souvenirs, pp. 234-35; King, Generals and Politicians, pp. 32, 35; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 141; Poincaré, Au service, V, 356.

[26] King, Generals and Politicians, pp. 28-29, 33; Messimy, Souvenirs, p. 235; Bruntz, Propaganda Organization and the Collapse of the German Empire, pp. 8-9.

Grand Quartier Général

On August 5, 1914, with his removal to Grand Quartier Général (General Headquarters) at Vitry-le-François, General Joffre assumed full command of the French Armies of the Northeast.[27] The French Command structure which derived from the prewar General Staff Joffre inherited from his predecessors.[28] The personnel with which he staffed it and his method of command gave it his peculiar stamp.

At the summit of authority was the Commander-in-Chief, General Joseph J.-C. Joffre, assisted by a personal office staff of three aides-de-camp. Below the Commander-in-Chief was the Major-Général or Chief of Staff, General Belin, who had responsibility for the overall operation of the General Staff, a task in which he was assisted by two Aides-Majors-Généraux, Assistant Chiefs of Staff, Generals Berthelot and Deprez who supervised the four main bureaus. In the French system, the First Bureau was responsible for manpower and services, the Second, for intelligence, the Third, for operations and the Fourth, for railway operations. Consisting of approximately 50 officers at the outset, the French Staff also had responsibility for the conduct of relations with Allied armies.[29]

---

[27] T #21, "Ordre général n° 2," 5 August, 1914, AFGG, I(I) A, no. 53; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 237-38. For Joffre's progressive assumption of military authority from the War Minister, see King, Generals and Politicians, pp. 13-16.

[28] Desmazes, Joffre, p. 248.

In the French Command, the Major-Général was also responsible for the execution of the Commander-in-Chief's decisions,[30] but Belin, because of ill health, delegated most of the responsibility for the conduct of operations to Berthelot, the Assistant Chief of Staff who supervised the key Second and Third Bureaus, charged respectively with intelligence and operations.[31] Nicknamed the "Fat Boy" by Wilson, the massive Berthelot was recognized by Joffre as a "powerful mind" and "an exceptional intelligence."[32] "The effective brain at GQG," Berthelot dominated discussions at Headquarters and drafted many of the orders, thus holding much authority initially over the direction of operations. His chief administrative failing was the inability to delegate responsibility to and accept advice from his subordinates of the Third Bureau.[33]

---

[29] Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 90-93, 336; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 239-40; Berthelot, Diary, I, iii and entry of 5 August, 1914, p. 15; For the operation of the German Central Headquarters, see W. Hubatsch, "Grosses Hauptquartier 1914/18," Ostdeutsche Wissenschaft-Jahrbuch . . ., V (1959), 422ff. Cf. Hittle, The Military Staff, pp. 161-67, 109-14; and Walter Gorlitz, The German General Staff: Its History and Structure, 1657-1945 tr. by Brian Battershaw (London: Hollis and Carter, 1953), pp. 131, 145, 148.

[30] Hittle, The Military Staff, pp. 67, 73.

[31] Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 92; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 239-40; Berthelot, Diary, I, iii and entry of August 5, 1914, p. 15.

[32] Henry Wilson, Diaries, V, Imperial War Museum (hereinafter cited IWM), DS/Misc/80, entry of November 24, 1914; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 239-40. One of the more humorous photographs of the war is that of the corpulent Berthelot being embraced by an equally massive Joffre in the French manner on Berthelot's reception of a military honour. (Shown to me by Berthelot's nephew, Mr. Jean-Claude Dubois, 65, rue Nicolas-le-Doux, 78746 - Cresseley, St. Rémy-les-Chevreuses, France.)

[33] Messimy, Souvenirs, p. 261; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 239-40; Ber-

Adviser to Joffre on operations of the French as well as the British Army, Berthelot showed a curious fixation on the strategy of striking at the enemy's centre or inner flank and, as his intimate diary reveals, was the most hearty of anglophobes, always critical and distrustful of the British and on occasion extremely vituperative toward them.[34]

Rapidly rising to power was Colonel Pellé, who had long served as military attaché in Berlin before the war. A cultivated military diplomat, fully conversant with the German military milieu, he was well known to Joffre, having served as his Chief of Staff in Madagascar. Replacing General Deprez in mid-August as Assistant Chief of Staff responsible for services, Pellé further replaced Berthelot as Assistant Chief of Staff in charge of operations and intelligence in November, 1914, and ultimately Belin as Chief of Staff when the latter's health broke down in late 1915.[35]

A striking characteristic of Joffre's Command was the wide-ranging authority wielded by junior officers of limited military experience who, beyond those cited, comprised the remainder of his Staff. Although personalities of considerable differences in outlook and approach, French Staff officers, for the most part, were young men, selected by Joffre on the basis of their high performance at the Ecole Supérieure de la Guerre. In harmony with the German Staff concept of doctrinal unity,

---

thelot, Diary, I, iii and passim. See also Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 92. Castelnau, who played a similar role in the drafting of Plan XVII, was designated for command of the Second Army prior to the outbreak of war. (Joffre, Mémoires, I, 182.)

[34] See especially, Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of November 16, 1914, pp. 232-33.

[35] Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 90, 94 and n. 1; Jean d'Esme, Le Père Joffre (Paris: Editions France-Empire, 1962), pp. 72-73. See also Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of 5 August, 1914, p. 15; AFGG, X(I), 7, 8.

which Joffre consciously sought to apply, they were fully imbued with the spirit of offensive thought.[36] Known as the "Young Turks" because of their zeal for offensive action, these young men served the role of an external imagination to the singularly unimaginative sixty-two year old Commander-in-Chief. Before making definitive decisions, Joffre habitually consulted not only his chief advisers but also the most "diverse creative intelligences" of his junior Staff.[37]

To head his personal office staff, Joffre chose Major Maurice Gamelin, who had long served in that capacity prior to Joffre's appointment as Chief of the General Staff. A brilliant young officer who had acquired very high standing at the Ecole Supérieure de la Guerre, Gamelin was especially influential, for he was the personal "confidant" of the General-in-Chief, ate at his mess and served as his liaison with the powerful Third Bureau responsible for operations.[38] After the departure of the Grand Quartier Général from Vitry-le-François to Bar-sur-Aube on August 31, 1914, as the French Army retreated, Gamelin slept in a chamber adjacent to that of the General-in-Chief and was charged with the important discretionary role of disturbing him from his much coveted slumber on receipt of urgent news.[39] Deeply nationalistic, Gamelin evinced a considerable impatience in dealing with seemingly unruffled and unhurried British Allies. "Dear and great British Allies," he wrote many years later, "you have often brought us to despair by your habits of believing that there is never any hurry."[40]

---

[36] Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 336; Weygand, Mémoires, I, 182; cf. Hittle, The Military Staff, pp. 72-73.

[37] Weygand, Mémoires, I, 182; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 16-17, 336; Desmazes, Joffre, pp. 248-49.

[38] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of 5 August, 1914, p. 15; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 19-21, 90.

[39] Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 90-91.

Assisting Gamelin as aides-de-camp to the Chief were Captains Galbert and Muller. The former kept Joffre's desk clear of the massive paper piles generated by modern warfare and answered the telephone in the Chief's absence. He also drafted some of the letters sent by Joffre to Sir John French and was sent on at least one very important, if unsuccessful, liaison mission to the British High Command.[41]

Of the four bureaus at GQG, the Third Bureau charged with operations, like the Operations Bureau in the German General Staff, proved to be by far the most powerful.[42] Headed by the hardworking Colonel Pont, it included a bevy of officers; one other colonel, lieutenant-colonels, majors and captains, most of whom served as liaison officers to the armies in the field.[43] Though junior in rank and experience to the generals in the field, these officers, because of their direct access to the Chief, were able to assist in seating or unseating the commanding generals by alternate praise or criticism.[44] Their discretionary power, nonetheless, was not so great as that assigned to the German Lieutenant-Colonel Hentsch who, sent out by Moltke under unusual circumstances on September 8, had full authority to order the advance or retreat of the German Armies.[45] The officers of the Third Bureau, because of their close contact with the Commander-in-Chief, nonetheless were in a position to influence his decisions. Similarly, Colonel Penelon, formerly of Poincaré's military cabinet, and Major Herbillon, who served as liaison officers to the Government and President of the Republic, wielded considerable political power in their role as "soldier to the politicians and politician to the soldiers."[46]

---

[40] Ibid., pp. 17, 134.

[41] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 239, 292; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 91-92, 183.

[42] Cf. Hittle, The Military Staff, p. 70.

[43] Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 93; Alexandre, Avec Joffre, p. 120.

[44] Alexandre, Avec Joffre, p. 120; Pichot-Duclos, Réflexions, pp. 186-88, 228-30.

Very soon after the German invasion of Belgian territory, a power struggle developed between the Third Bureau, with Gamelin as their spokesman, and General Berthelot, Assistant Chief of Staff in charge of operations, over the proper strategy needed to meet the German thrust across northern France. The Third Bureau, whose initial role was administrative, largely that of sending out orders and positioning armies on the map, refused to be stifled by Berthelot in its advocacy of forming a new army on the Allied left wing in order to strike on the outer German flank. This conflict over strategy allowed Joffre to choose between broader alternatives during the "Great Retreat" and resulted in the successful Battle of the Marne. The Third Bureau, whose advice was followed, thus emerged triumphant from the power struggle and acquired the right to advise the Chief directly on operational matters. Ultimately Berthelot was replaced by Pellé on November 22 and the subject of an "elegant sacking" was given command of a Group of Reserve Divisions.[47]

---

[45] Hittle, The Military Staff, p. 74; Richard M. Watt, Dare Call It Treason (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), pp. 68-69.

[46] Herbillon, Souvenirs, I, 13 ; Alexandre, Avec Joffre, p. 120.

[47] Pichot-Duclos, Réflexions, pp. 189, 193; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 92-93, 62-66, 106-07, 181-84; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 239-40, 379-86; cf. Hittle, The Military Staff, pp. 72-73.

His departure would lead to a more obliging attitude toward the British, for advice on relations with the British was an intrinsic part of the strategic and operational advice which now passed into other hands.

The operation of Joffre's Command was characterized by order, calm and authority. Following a leisurely country routine, Joffre arose early, assembled his aides-de-camp, Chief and Assistant Chiefs of Staff, and Bureau heads at 7:00 a.m. for a morning report summarizing the major happenings of the night. Then, mid-morning, after clearing off his desk, he took a walk, with his chief Staff advisers and some members of his personal entourage. A similar walk after the evening report preceded his early retirement.[48] Far removed from the scene of battle or even close contact with its executants and having, unlike the British Commander, no personal rapport with the soldiers, Joffre and his Staff played the game of war on maps, serenely, confidently, and according to the best information at hand.[49] An atmosphere of calm and order thus prevailed, even during the most difficult moments of the "Great Retreat," which contributed greatly to the reversal of fortunes on the Marne.[50] The contrast with Gamelin's Command in May, 1940, is instructive on this point.

---

[48] Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 91; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 239.

[49] See Pierrefeu, GQG, I, 1-5. Cf. A. J. P. Taylor, The First World War: An Illustrated History (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1963), p. 20. Joffre demonstrated not only his sensitivity but his remoteness from the reality of warfare when, upon visiting an ambulance, he vowed not to return. Otherwise, said he, "I could not sign an order to attack." (Raymond Cahisa, "Le double roman d'amour de Joffre le Pyréneen," Miroir de l'Histoire, VII (1956), no. 81, p. 337; Desmazes, Joffre, p. 246.) The British Commander, Sir John French, maintained a much closer relationship with his troops. (See, for example, Field Marshal Viscount French of Ypres, 1914 (London: Constable and Company, Ltd., 1919), p. 89.

[50] See Herbillon, Souvenirs, I, entry of September 3, 1914, p. 25. Cf. Joffre, Mémoires, I, 240.

A shrewd organizer, Joffre devoted most of his time to the decision-making process. In eclectic fashion, he silently heard advice of varying qualities from all levels. Then, "he ripened his decisions in the silence of his office," wrote a close aide. "Once his decision made, he threw all his means of action into the balance to obtain the [desired] result." There were "neither hesitation nor second thought; he knew how to assume his responsibilities."[51]

Unlike Moltke, who, far to the rear and hampered by poor radio communications, left an excessive degree of initiative to his field commanders, Joffre effectively commanded his armies, in a personal and authoritarian manner.[52] In addition to use of the telephone and telegraph for a regular exchange of messages, he made extensive use of liaison officers who, as the Chief's personal envoys, delivered written messages to the commanding generals, often with the addition of verbal instruction from the General-in-Chief himself. The reports of these officers were especially cherished by Joffre, who gleaned an impression of the state of morale and competence of the field commanders which might not be evident in their written reports. Joffre thus kept his finger on the pulse of his armies at all times. The coordination of their movements according to overall objectives was assured by constant and direct control.[53]

---

[51] D'Esme, Le Père Joffre, p. 29, quoting Muller, one of Joffre's aides-de-camp.

[52] For a comparison of the two commanders and their styles of command, see Pierre Dominique, "Les deux chefs allemand et français en août - septembre 1914," Ecrits de Paris, CCXXIX (1964), 58-65; also Gorlitz, The German General Staff, pp. 157-58.

[53] Pichot-Duclos, Réflexions, pp. 228-30; Alexandre, Avec Joffre, pp. 120-21; Desmazes, Joffre, pp. 249-51.

Joffre and his associates, in fact, rejected the entire German Staff concept of initiative, which allowed the Commander-in-Chief to provide little more than guidelines to the field commanders on the assumption that the staffs of the armies, imbued with the same doctrine and training as the Central Headquarters, could be relied upon to advise the right decisions on their own.[54] Joffre's method of direct control nonetheless produced some aberrations. Inexperienced young officers were not necessarily capable of assessing the abilities of more senior commanders. Yet their recommendations were responsible for the large-scale removal of field generals undertaken by Joffre to toughen the leadership of the French Army after its initial defeats. Such vast extension of personal authority in the hands of inexperienced junior officers also tended to stifle initiative on the part of the senior generals in the field.[55] The French system nonetheless proved to be the more effective for the coordination of mass armies when one or more of them was exposed to grave danger, as exemplified by the French experience during the "Great Retreat" and the German experience on the Marne.

Joffre's genius lay not in personal brilliance but in his capacity to delegate to his subordinates the numerous tasks of the High Command and to take full advantage of their diverse advisory talents while reserving to himself effective control. Although his Command was somewhat analogous in structure to the German Command, the method of command was quite different. Joffre commanded in a direct and authoritarian manner. A systematic, authoritarian military bureaucrat, he imposed calm and order at GQG which contributed greatly to his success.

---

[54] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 399-402; Carrias, La pensée militaire, pp. 300-01; cf. Hittle, The Military Staff, pp. 72-73.

[55] Carrias, La pensée militaire, pp. 302-03.

In dealing with the British, Joffre would tend to view the British Expeditionary Force as merely another army under his command, subject to French direction and fully obliged to carry it out. Needless to say, the British, who saw themselves more as partners than subordinates, were not always amenable to that relationship.

British Government and High Command
August - November, 1914

In Great Britain, as in France, the outbreak of war was attended by an increase in executive power. Unlike the French Cabinet, however, which departed substantially from republican tradition by concentrating vast powers in the hands of the Commander-in-Chief, the British Government maintained very close control over the Commander of the British Expeditionary Force. The unique aspect in the British case was the unusual concentration of power in the hands of the Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener, responsible for military affairs, who, along with Churchill, the clever and aggressive young First Lord of the Admiralty, responsible for naval affairs in the Cabinet, assumed strategic direction of the war during the first ten months.[56]

As in France, the most potent force in British public life, soon to be shackled and manipulated in the name of war, was British public opinion. On August 2, with Germany and Russia already at war, Asquith faced a serious split within his Cabinet between the pacifist Radicals, four of whom submitted their resignations, and "interventionist" Imperial Liberals on the question of British participation in the war. Then news of German violation of neutral Belgium on August 3, in open disregard of

---

[56] See Guinn, British Strategy and Politics, p. 34.

German treaty obligations, swung public opinion--whose most overt expression was the cheering of war-enthusiastic crowds in the streets--in favour of intervention. Near unanimity was immediately restored within the Cabinet. Of the four ministers who had tendered resignations, only Lord John Morley, President of the Council, and John Burns, President of the Board of Trade, did not reconsider.[57] The German invasion of Belgium thus provided the "priceless gift" of national unity, harmonizing the views of the majority of the British people who looked upon policy largely in terms of morality and the inner core of defence planners who conceived policy largely in terms of power politics and the defence of vital interests.[58] A national consensus in favour of war had then been formed in Great Britain as in France.

The advent of war also led in Great Britain to a considerable strengthening of the Cabinet's executive power. On August 8, 1914, four days after the British declaration of war against Germany, the first Defence of the Realm Act was passed, which, strengthened by further measures on August 27 and November 27, gave the Cabinet authorization to regulate by order-in-council all matters pertaining to the security and defence of the kingdom. Included in this wide-ranging grant of power was the right to limit freedom of the press and to mobilize the human and material resources of the state for war. Although the House of Commons retained the role of official watchdog, it met infrequently and, largely deferring to the Cabinet, did not review the strategic conduct of the war. The powers granted the British Cabinet were thus even broader in scope than those accorded the French Government by the French Chamber and Senate on August 4, 1914.[59]

---

[57] The Earl of Oxford and Asquith, Memories and Reflections, 1852-1927 (2 vols.; Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1928), II, 11-14, 24-25; David Lloyd George, War Memoirs of David Lloyd George (6 vols.; London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1933-36), I, 65-67, 70-71.

[58] Guinn, British Strategy and Politics, p. 35; Howard, Continental Commitment, pp. 53-54.

As in France, basic issues were adjourned in British public life for the greater good of fighting the war. Irish Home Rule, the hottest issue before the country, was put on the statute books, not without the opposition of the Unionists, who walked out of the House of Commons in protest on September 14, but was then forgotten, its implementation being suspended until six months after the war. Other issues, the tariff and the degree of Liberal commitment to the war effort, were conveniently ignored.[60] Called upon in the name of the people to fight the war, the Liberals, who represented the less bellicose part of public opinion, in fact enjoyed the general support of the House of Commons, including that of forty-one Labour members, except for Ramsay Macdonald, their disavowed leader, four or five of his personal supporters, and a few others. The opposition Unionists under Bonar Law were quite content to keep the Liberals fully tied to the war effort by the exercise of power. They therefore made no demand for broadening of the ministry until the munitions crisis of May, 1915, led to the creation of the first Coalition Government.[61]

Asquith's Government, however, was little prepared for the energetic pursuit of the war. In a government of departments, "each minister was left to the conduct of his own department," with Asquith, the "detached chairman," intervening only when necessary to resolve disputes.[62] Rather than form a super-cabinet to preside over the conduct of the war with the advice of the Committee of Imperial Defence and the Imperial General Staff, Asquith decided, in response to popular demand, to call in a strong "emergency man" as Secretary of State for War, to direct the war effort and at the same time buoy up the Liberals' less than martial image. On August 6, 1914, he thus yielded to popular demand from both Unionists and Liberals by filling the post he had held personally since the Curragh Affair with the Empire's most distinguished soldier, Field Marshal Horatio Herbert Kitchener, who happened to be in London at the time from Egypt. The competent but somewhat tarnished Haldane, author of the 1907 reforms, recalled but three days earlier to succeed Asquith, was dismissed. The appointment was a popular success. The martial-looking sixty-four year old Kitchener, renowned for his conquest of the Sudan and South Africa and his administration of India and Egypt, soon became the symbol of the nation's will to victory.[63]

---

[59] Renouvin, La crise européenne, pp. 218-19; A. J. P. Taylor, English History, 1914-1945 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 18.

[60] See Asquith, Memories and Reflections, II, 4-10, 31, 34, 40-41; A. J. P. Taylor, Politics in Wartime and other Essays (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1964), p. 13.

[61] Taylor, Politics in Wartime, pp. 13-15, 16-20; Taylor, English History, pp. 15-16. The Labour Party, at the outset, turned down a Liberal offer of inclusion in the Government.

A "hazardous" political "experiment," the appointment of a renowned soldier as Secretary of State for War entirely undid the political-military reforms of the previous decade. Having lived in the far reaches of the Empire since his youth, Kitchener knew little and cared even less about the administration of the British Army.[64] The reforms of the political-military structure since the Boer War, moreover, designed to combine professional advice with ministerial control, were anathema to his sense of undivided authority.[65] His method, as an "Oriental autocrat," was to make decisions intuitively and then by his personal authority impose them on his subordinates. Ill-equipped for the give and take of Cabinet debate, he disdained his political colleagues, some of whom he overawed with his presence and with whom he was very secretive.[66] "If there is a war and they want me," he wrote L. S. Amery, "I'll take a house well away from the War Office and run the war from there."[67]

---

[62] Taylor, Politics in Wartime, p. 15.

[63] Guinn, British Strategy and Politics, pp. 31, 35; Asquith, Memories and Reflections, II, 30-31; Taylor, English History, p. 7; Brigadier Peter Young, The British Army, 1642-1970 (London: William Kimber, 1967), p. 215; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entries of August 3, 4, 1914; Grey, Twenty-Five Years, II, 69-70. For the most recent biography of Kitchener, see George H. Cassar, Kitchener: Architect of Victory (London: William Kimber, 1977).

As Secretary of State for War, Kitchener wielded undisputed authority over British military strategy and the mobilization of men and resources within the Empire. Assuming the powers of the defunct office of Commander-in-Chief, he "abandoned to the winds such institutions as the Army Council and General Staff," the Chief of the Imperial General Staff being reduced to a mere cypher. As in France, the most competent members of the General Staff departed with the field command. Not attempting to compensate for their loss, Kitchener assumed personal responsibility for the war effort at the War Office and the direction of strategy within the Cabinet.[68] Under the aegis of the Prime Minister, he and

---

[64] Asquith, Memories and Reflections, II, 30; Guinn, British Strategy and Politics, p. 31.

[65] Hamer, The British Army, x, xi; Sixsmith, British Generalship, pp. 32-36.

[66] Sixsmith, British Generalship, p. 36; Lord [Maurice P. A. H.] Hankey, The Supreme Command, 1914-1918 (2 vols.; London: George Allen and Unwin, 1961), I, 186.

[67] Hamer, The British Army, p. 261.

[68] Ibid., pp. 261-63; Sixsmith, British Generalship, p. 55; Robert

Churchill, acting similarly in regard to naval affairs, functioning in informal sessions, and often without expert advice, made vital strategic decisions. The Committee of Imperial Defence, which might have advised the Government, was largely ignored and even when constituted as a War Council at the end of November, 1914, did not materially alter the existing power relationships.[69]

In his relations with the field command of the BEF, Kitchener assumed more the role of military superior rather than that of civilian link with the Cabinet, who were ultimately responsible for the direction of strategy and the approval of senior field appointments.[70] Treating Sir John French, the Commander-in-Chief of the BEF, as a military subordinate, Kitchener instructed him to provide the War Office with detailed information and on occasion intervened directly in his operations. Sir John, in particular, resented Kitchener's appearance in Paris on September 1, 1914, in the dress of a Field Marshal and complained bitterly to other members of the Cabinet of interference in his operations.[71] That "an estrangement, or at any rate a coldness, of long standing" existed between Kitchener and Sir John from their association in the South African War only added to the conflict.[72]

Blake, "Great Britain: The Crimean War to the First World War," in Michael Howard, ed., Soldiers and Governments: Nine Studies in Civil-Military Relations (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1957), p. 41; Taylor, English History, p. 7; Young, The British Army, p. 216.

[69] Hankey, The Supreme Command, I, 187-98ff; Guinn, British Strategy and Politics, pp. 33-34; John Ehrman, Cabinet Government and War, 1890-1940 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), pp. 55, 58.

[70] See Blake, "Great Britain," pp. 39, 41.

[71] French, 1914, pp. 15, 99-100ff; Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 277-79.

[72] See Asquith, Memories and Reflections, II, 58.

Though "secretive, power-loving and incapable of delegation,"[73] Kitchener nonetheless was a man of vision and insight on occasion. According to Lloyd George, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, he was like "one of those revolving lighthouses which radiates momentary gleams of revealing light far out into the surrounding gloom and then suddenly relapses into complete darkness."[74] One of his great insights was perception of the true nature of the war.

Unlike his contemporaries, Wilson in particular, who believed in a short, cheap war, Kitchener, at his first meeting with the Cabinet, startled his colleagues by asserting that the war would last for three years and that an army of millions would be required to win it.[75] Kitchener nonetheless was unjustly scornful of the partially trained Territorial Army of fourteen infantry divisions and fourteen cavalry brigades which Haldane had designed for home defence and as the basis for a mass army of the nation. Reflecting the professional's bias in favour of regular soldiers, disdain for the work of another man and his own zeal for improvisation, Kitchener planned an entirely new structure for the creation of "New Armies" of regulars, seventy divisions strong, which would only be ready much later. On August 7, he launched his first appeal for 100,000 volunteers. The response was overwhelming. Kitchener's appeal made enlistment popular and the success of enlistment enhanced his already towering reputation. In the next eighteen months,

---

[73] Blake, "Great Britain," p. 41.

[74] Quoted in Sixsmith, British Generalship, p. 78.

[75] George Arthur, The Life of Lord Kitchener (3 vols.; London: Macmillan and Co., 1920), III, 7-9; Taylor, English History, p. 20. Kitchener, however, did not forsee the advent of trench warfare. (Ibid.)

2,467,000 volunteers joined the Army.[76]

Recruiting of the New Armies marked the transition in British opinion from a limited to a broader commitment to the war. On August 3, Grey assured the House of Commons that the nation would "suffer but little more" by participation in the European War than if it stood aside. The slogan of "business as usual" was symbolic of the popular belief in a short war of limited liability, in which the British Navy and the continental armies of France and Russia would, in a matter of months or even weeks, defeat Germany on sea and on land. The war, however, did not develop as planned and by the end of November, with the advent of trench warfare, the concept of a short, cheap war was no longer tenable.[77]

Public opinion nonetheless had been prepared. After the departure of the BEF to France, the British people, hungry for news, relished the feats of heroism of the British Force reported in the censored press, which was silent on grand strategy or even the exploits of Britain's Allies. Cambon in London, for example, complained repeatedly to his Government of the lack of coverage in the British Press of French military operations.[78] German atrocity stories, largely invented, and recruiting meetings, at which the demagogic Horatio Bottomley was an immediate success, further whipped up the nation's war spirit.[79] The flood of recruits for whom there were neither sufficient rifles nor housing nor qualified instructors represented not only the voluntary mobilization of a significant portion of the nation's manpower, but the deepening of popular commitment to the war effort.[80]

---

[76] Young, The British Army, pp. 217-19; Taylor, English History, p. 20. Of these, 726,000 joined the Territorial Force. (Above sources.)

[77] Taylor, English History, pp. 4, 20, 23.

[78] Ibid., p. 18; Taylor, Politics in Wartime, p. 16; Letter, Cambon to Delcassé, September 12, 1914, Delcassé Papers, AE, T 3, 329-34; Cambon to Foch, Northern Army Group Commander, November 13, 1914, AFF, file "Paul Cambon et F. Foch." Cambon's complaint was not so much with the British Press as with the French Government and Command, whom he felt provided inadequate press information.

[79] Taylor, English History, pp. 18-19, 20-22; Taylor, Politics in Wartime, pp. 16-17; James Morgan Read, Atrocity Propaganda, 1914-1919 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), pp. 8-9.

In terms of grand strategy, that broadened popular commitment was transformed into a larger and larger military commitment to the war in France. Though a significant part of this essay is concerned with the evolution of Britain's continental commitment, a summary overview seems appropriate at this point. Unable to resist the pressure of prewar staff planning, Kitchener reluctantly agreed to have four infantry and one cavalry divisions (five-sevenths) of the BEF operate in a forward position with the French Army in August, 1914, but only on condition, as his instructions to Sir John French make clear, that the safety of the Force was not endangered.[81] Thereafter, Kitchener, responding to crises in the field, was unable to resist the demands of continental warfare.

To prevent French collapse, he was obliged to go to Paris on September 1 and compel the BEF to fight in full cooperation with the French. Impressed with the urgent need for reinforcements in the field, he then sent another division, one having been ordered forward in the interim, and all available regular forces in succession, as they assembled from the far corners of the Empire. In October, he dispatched battalions of Territorials as reinforcements. Then, witnessing at close range during his visit to Dunkirk on November 1, 1914, the military crisis of the Battle of Ypres, he not only sent immediate reinforcements but promised the French a further million men for the great campaign of 1915. By November, 1914, British commitment to the continent, though based solely on the pledges of the Secretary of State for War, was virtually complete.

---

[80] See Taylor, English History, pp. 20-21; Young, The British Army, pp. 217-18.

[81] For "Instructions to Sir John French from Lord Kitchener, August, 1914," see Great Britain, Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence, History of the Great War Based on Official Documents, compiled by Brigadier-General Sir James E. Edmonds et al (1st ed. except France and Belgium, 1914, Vol. I and Maps in 3rd ed. (1933); 14 vols.; London: Macmillan and Co., 1922-47), Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1914, Vol. I, Appendix 8, pp. 499-500. (Work hereinafter cited as HGW.) A. J. P. Taylor claims Kitchener expected the French Armies to be defeated in the field. (English History, p. 20, n. 1.) For a fuller account of Kitchener's approach to initial use of the BEF,

Kitchener's farsighted wisdom in creating mass armies for ultimate triumph, nonetheless, soon brought him into conflict with the field Command of the BEF, pursuing an operational strategy of immediate victory in collaboration with the French Army. The basic issue, apart from the question of sending all available forces to France, was the competition between the BEF and the New Armies for officers. British loss of officers was especially high during the first months of war and Sir John's urgent demands for replacements after mid-September could not be met.[82] Kitchener's unwillingness "to meet the famine of the moment by devouring the seed-corn of the future," undoubtedly the right strategy, was keenly resented nevertheless at British Headquarters where lack of regimental and non-commissioned officers was blamed, especially after the Battle of the Aisne, for the BEF's inadequate success on the field of battle.[83]

---

see Chapter III below.

[82] Letter, Asquith to the King, September 16, 1914, PRO, Cab 41/35/44 #R/181; Letter, French to Kitchener, September 19, 1919, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/23. See Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 27, 1914.

[83] Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 281-82; Maurice, Lessons, pp. 7-8; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 19, 1914.

The lack of proper officers for the New Armies, on the other hand, resulted in inadequate training of the Force and a costly blood-bath on its initiation to offensive trench warfare on the Somme in 1916.[84]

Another cause of conflict with Sir John was the Cabinet's apparent reversal of strategy over Antwerp. The strategy of continental intervention, adopted in 1911 and applied in August 1914, was the product of divided councils. The concept of the "blue water" school of war at sea and amphibious raids or landings using the Royal Navy for launching the BEF to a strategic target had been temporarily muted by the departure of the BEF for France in August, but reemerged in mid-September, when the strategy of direct cooperation with the French armies failed to provide for the safety of Antwerp and the Channel ports.[85] Although in favour of moving the BEF north from the Aisne to the outer Allied flank, Sir John energetically resisted the threat of a second British command in Belgium, even to the extent of consorting with the French on October 5, against his own Secretary of State for War.[86] With French support, Sir John obtained satisfaction on the issue.[87] The power structure which allowed him to succeed on that issue would tempt him to use the same procedure later on many others.

The British Field Command

Field Marshal Sir John Denton Pinkstone French, appointed to command the British Expeditionary Force in France, arrived in Paris on August 15, 1914. A small, dapper cavalry officer of fine aristocratic breeding, renowned for his daring exploits in the South African War, the sixty-two year old Field Marshal combined qualities of greatness, such as courage, loyalty, generosity and understanding, with obvious faults, such as prickly sensitivity to superior authority, a highly mercurial temperament and a tendency toward moodiness and even pettiness on occasion. Arrogantly British, proud of his command and jealous of his powers, he was anxious to maintain the prerogatives of his command against all would-be offenders.[88]

---

[84] Young, The British Army, pp. 217-18.

[85] See Hankey, The Supreme Command, I, 192-205.

[86] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 461; Poincaré Papers, XXXVII, BN, NAF (16028), "Notes Journalières," entry of October 9, 1914 (events of October 5, 1914), p. 127.

[87] See Letters, Kitchener to French, 10, 11 -10-14, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/30, 32.

Sir John's instructions, drawn up by Kitchener and approved by the Cabinet, reflected the limited nature of initial British commitment to continental defence. As Grey told Cambon on August 1, before the decision for war had been made, dispatch of the BEF to the continent was a "dangerous" project, which "Parliament would not authorize unless our interests and obligations were deeply and desperately involved."[89] When sent, the BEF would be instructed to avoid serious risks. The British Expeditionary Force of four and a half infantry divisions and one cavalry division, as sent to France, though extremely small by continental standards, in fact represented the larger portion of available British land forces. They could be lost in an afternoon if needlessly exposed. Thus, while instructed to "support and cooperate with the French Army," Sir John was strongly warned against "forward movements where large bodies of French troops are not exposed to attack." Instructing Sir John to keep the War Office fully informed of his movements and to seek the advice of the Government before endangering the Force, Kitchener further emphasized the independent nature of Sir John's Command. "You will in no case come in any sense under the orders of any Allied General," he affirmed.[90]

---

[88] Young, The British Army, p. 198; Taylor, English History, p. 8; Huguet, Britain and the War, pp. 46-47; Spears, Liaison, pp. 74, 281; d'Esme, Le Père Joffre, pp. 86-87; Poincaré Papers, XXXVI, BN, NAF (16027), "Notes Journalières," entry of 15 August, 1915; John Terraine, Mons: The Retreat to Victory (London: B.T. Batsford,1960),pp. 32-37.

[89] Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 345-53.

In these instructions lay the seeds of a great deal of difficulty with the French Command. The conditional nature of British support and the full independence of the British Command outlined in Sir John's instructions were much at odds with the unstinted support and compliance with direction expected by the French Command. That difference of approach would not become unduly disruptive, however, until failure of the initial French plan of attack on August 23 shook the confidence of the British Commander-in-Chief in French leadership and focussed his attention more on saving the British Force than cooperation with the French Army.

The task of cooperating with the French while following instruction from home in fact proved to be a source of great frustration to Sir John. Irritated by the narrowness of his discretionary powers, Sir John appealed to other Cabinet members against Kitchener's close control of operations, to the French against the dictates of British grand strategy and to Kitchener against the French conduct of operations. Whenever a dispute arose between Commands, however, Kitchener could be trusted, because of his attitude of solidarity with the French, to side with Joffre. The two basic problems of relationship with the French and relationship between government and command were thus acutely manifest from the beginning.[91]

---

[90] "Instructions to Sir John French from Lord Kitchener, August, 1914," HGW,(1914), I, Appendix 8, pp. 499-500; French, 1914, pp. 13-15; Arthur, Kitchener, III, 25-26.

Within Sir John's Command, moreover, existed grave cleavages which detracted from its effective operation. The Chief of the General Staff, Sir Archibald Murray, was methodical and intelligent but had little capacity for coping with crisis. He was suspicious of the French and their plans and his counsels were almost always toward excessive caution and prudence.[92] Brigadier-General Sir Henry Wilson, on the other hand, as Sub-Chief of Staff, was unduly reckless in his advocacy of offensive action. More French than the French, and entirely francophile, Wilson was an uncritical advocate at all times of complete British compliance with French military direction. Enjoying Sir John's confidence, he was continuously in conflict with Murray, whose office he coveted and for which he intrigued relentlessly both with Sir John and his entourage and the French Command. The British Command was thus one great cauldron of ferment during Wilson's entire period as Sub-Chief of Staff.[93]

Wilson nonetheless was intelligent and imaginative, quick to perceive the ramifications of a situation, calm under duress, and extremely valuable, because of his close ties with the French, in coordinating the strategy and movements of the two armies. Colonel G. M. W. Macdonogh, moreover, headed British intelligence, which, making innovative use of airplanes, was to prove excellent. The Quarter-Master General, responsible for logistics and supply, Major-General William Robertson, the ultimate beneficiary of the Wilson-Murray duel, demonstrated his usual good sense and military tough-mindedness. Sir John thus headed a military team of considerable competence, but one divided against itself. Less firm-willed than Joffre, whose command was also troubled by internal conflicts, Sir John vacillated between the tendencies represented by Murray and Wilson, swinging between extremes of excessive enthusiasm and near despair.[94]

---

[91] Hankey, Supreme Command, I, 188-89ff.

[92] See Huguet, Britain and the War, p. 47.

[93] See Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, passim, August 1, 1914 - January 30, 1915; Cf. Huguet, Britain and the War, pp. 47-48, who had a more intimate knowledge of events at British Headquarters than he cared to divulge in his memoirs. Wilson, in the bad graces of the Asquith Government because of his role in the Irish question, was initially "reduced" to Brigadier-General of Operations but managed, through discussion with Sir John French, to have his appointment changed to Sub-Chief of Staff. (Ibid., entries of July 30 and August 3, 1914.) See also French, 1914, p. 5; HGW, (1914), I, "Order of Battle of the British Expeditionary Force, August, 1914," Appendix 1, p. 471, which wrongly gives Wilson's rank as Major-General.

Conclusions

In the political-military power structure of the coalition lay many of the unique aspects of its operation. While public opinion called for strong military leadership in both countries, the institutional response was quite different. In anticipation of a short war of manoeuvre, the French Government conferred vast powers on the Commander-in-Chief, entrusting him with the strategic conduct of the war. In Great Britain, the Government responded to the demands of public opinion by installing a strong military Secretary of State for War, giving a martial appearance to a civilian Cabinet, but upsetting all the machinery which had been elaborated in the previous decade for professional advice and civilian control in the conduct of war. Both appointments, by concentrating the direction of wartime strategy in the hands of a strong military personality, represented a substantial deviation from democratic practice. Neither arrangement was entirely satisfactory, as the formulation of policy and strategy, closely intertwined in wartime, ideally requires a close partnership between government and command.

---

[94] See French, 1914, pp. 5, 90, 107-09; HGW, (1914), I, "Order of Battle of the British Expeditionary Force, August, 1914," Appendix 1, p. 471; Huguet, Britain and the War, pp. 46-48; Terraine, Mons, pp. 59, 61, 73-74, 84-85, 109, 165; see below for a detailed account of the unfolding of events at British Headquarters.

On the French side, Joffre, exercising effective power over the strategic conduct of the war in harmony with the defence policy of his Government, spoke with the voice of the French Government and nation in pressing his demands on the British Government and the British Command. Kitchener, on the other side, also wielded great power but a power which, despite his control of military strategy, had to be shared with the First Lord of the Admiralty within the Cabinet. At the same time, he was subject increasingly to demands from the field for reinforcements, as crisis followed crisis. Serious political-military conflict, moreover, soon developed between Kitchener and Sir John French, the Commander of the BEF, as a result of the narrow range of discretion allowed Sir John, personal antipathy between the two, and conflict between the field strategy of immediate success sustained by Sir John and the French and Kitchener's preparation of mass armies for ultimate victory. To this was later added a dispute over the defence of Antwerp and the Channel ports. The conflict between Kitchener and Sir John from the outset thus weakened the British position in dealing with Joffre, while Kitchener, out of considerations of Allied solidarity, was likely to support Joffre in any dispute with Sir John. The net consequence of these relationships was Joffre's strategic domination of the coalition.

Much of the uniqueness of inter-command relations also derived from the nature and personnel of each command and the personality and method of each commander-in-chief. Rejecting the German concept of initiative, Joffre commanded his armies in a personal, authoritarian manner; he would tend to treat the BEF as merely another Army under his command. Instructed to both cooperate with the French Army and yet maintain an independent command, Sir John would alternate between enthusiasm for French strategic plans and resistance to French direction. Much of his willingness to cooperate with the French would depend on who had his ear at Headquarters, the cautious Murray or the reckless Wilson, and his degree of confidence in the most recent French plan.

CHAPTER III

FROM ENTENTE TO WARTIME COALITION

FRENCH STRATEGIC RESPONSE TO BRITISH POLICY AND STRATEGY, AUGUST 1 - 21, 1914

During the first days of August, 1914, the British Government made the momentous decision to participate in the European war which had just erupted and also to pursue a military strategy of intervention on the continent in direct support of the French Army.[1] The existence of the *Entente Cordiale* had but a marginal impact on the British decision for war, German invasion of Belgium being the decisive factor. Staff arrangements with the French, however, played a decisive role in shaping the military strategy adopted and thus the subsequent nature of British participation. With British entry into the war, the *Entente Cordiale* was transformed into a *de facto* political and military alliance with France, although official confirmation of the *Triple Entente* as a wartime coalition occurred only belatedly, on September 4, 1914, by the joint pledge of the *Entente* Powers not to make a separate peace.[2]

Although the French ultimately obtained their goal of British military support, all the prewar concerns of the French General Staff about British participation were accentuated during an initial period of uncertainty while the British made up their minds. Once London had decided for war, the question arose whether British forces would arrive in sufficient strength and in time for the first decisive battles. The latter concern, anticipated but not resolved in the prewar period, posed an important strategic problem for the French, who had to decide, in view of the German invasion of Belgium, the extent to which their strategic plans should be adjusted to allow for immediate British participation on the left flank of the French Army.

---

[1] For a detailed account of the impact of the *Entente Cordiale* on these two decisions, see Williamson, *Politics of Grand Strategy*, pp. 343-72. Cf. Grey, *Twenty-Five Years*, I, 298-331, II, 1-18; Asquith, *Memories and Reflections*, II, 8-13, 24-26, 30-31; Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, I, 152-78; Churchill, *The World Crisis*, I, 199-206, 231-33; Hankey, *The Supreme Command*, I, 169-73.

[2] See Grey, *Twenty-Five Years*, II, 161-64; Poincaré, *Au service*, IV, 194, 211, 232-33, 252-53.

As the Sarejevo crisis took a new and more menacing turn at the end of July, 1914, the news from London seemed to confirm French prewar apprehensions over British participation in a European war.[3] Guided by a distinctly anti-interventionist public opinion and dominance of the anti-war party in a badly divided Cabinet, the British Government reaffirmed repeatedly after July 29 its lack of formal commitment to France in the event of war. Neither the demonstration of France's peaceful intent by the withdrawal of her forces to ten kilometres from the German border on July 30 nor the personal appeal of Poincaré to King George V the next day nor Cambon's repeated appeals to British interests and British moral obligation to the French had much effect in London. As late as August 1, the first day of general war in Europe, Grey reaffirmed to Cambon on Cabinet advice Britain's lack of commitment to France and further emphasized the hostility of both the Cabinet and Parliament toward sending the BEF to the continent except as a last resort in defence of vital interests.[4]

---

[3] See Colonel Yarde Buller, British Military Attaché at French Headquarters, to Lord Kitchener, British Secretary of State for War, 4 February, 1915, Kitchener Private Office Papers, PRO, WO 159/10.

British interests, and to a lesser extent British moral obligation, nonetheless, soon led to one important commitment to the French Government. A Franco-German naval duel on Britain's very doorstep in the Channel was decidedly not in British interest, especially as the Germans were likely to win. Nor could the Cabinet completely ignore Cambon's pressing argument that the 1912 redeployment of the British and French fleets involved a British moral commitment to defend the French coast. As a result, the British Government pledged, on August 2, to provide naval defence of the French Channel ports. Although the German Government immediately promised to avoid naval action in the Channel in exchange for British neutrality, the pledge involved a substantial commitment to the French and as such was a large step toward British participation in the conflict.[5]

The deciding factor in British entry into the war was the German violation of Belgium, prefaced by the German ultimatum to that state on the evening of August 2 demanding the right of passage. Because a strong power in possession of the Low Countries would "be in a position to threaten Britain's trade in its terminal areas and perhaps even the security of Britain herself," it had long been a tenet of British foreign policy that no major power should be allowed to control the Belgian coast.[6] The British public, moreover, saw the German invasion of Belgium, in flagrant violation of the 1839 guarantee of Belgian independence and neutrality, as a crime. Unprepared to make war for Serbia, the Czar or even France, the British public responded in outrage to the wrong committed against "small," neutral Belgium: "Before the violation of Belgium 95 per cent of the British Nation were against intervention," observed a prominent member of the British Cabinet; "after the violation, 95 per cent were in favour of immediate intervention."[7] Inflexible application by Germany of a military plan particularly insensitive to political considerations, the Schlieffen Plan, which called for a large wheeling movement of troops across Belgium, thus caused an unequivocal British commitment to fight, forging the final link of the Anglo-French coalition which French diplomacy alone had been unable to obtain.[8] Great Britain declared war on Germany on August 4, 1914, and the mobilization of her Army, ordered the previous day, was set for the night of August 4-5.[9]

---

[4] Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 345-53; Asquith, Memories and Reflections, II, 10, 12; Grey, Twenty-Five Years, I, 320-31.

[5] Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 352-55; Grey, Twenty-Five Years, II, 1-3.

[6] Gibbs, "British Strategic Doctrine," p. 189; Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 355-57.

The Royal Navy, meantime, largely as a result of measures taken by the bellicose Churchill on his own initiative as First Lord of the Admiralty, had far outstripped the Army in preparation for war. Already on July 26, the First Sea Lord, with Churchill's approval, had countermanded dispersal of the First and Second Fleets, still concentrated in home waters off Portland after the annual manoeuvres. Then, on July 29, with approval of only the Prime Minister, Churchill ordered the First Fleet (later the Grand Fleet) to steam up the Channel by night, lights extinguished, to its war station off Scapa Flow in the North Sea, ready to maintain an "observational" blockade of Germany. Again, on his own initiative, the First Lord of the Admiralty, upon learning of the German declaration of war against Russia, ordered full mobilization of the Royal Navy on August 1. This order, which exceeded his legal mandate, was approved in Cabinet only the next day. Finally, on August 2, after the British guarantee to defend the French coast, Churchill promptly entered into discussions with the French to resolve such outstanding matters as the sharing of bases and command in the Mediterranean. The Royal Navy, although still making arrangement for Anglo-French cooperation in the Mediterranean, was thus fully prepared in the North Sea for the order issued to it at 11:00 p.m. on August 4 to "commence hostilities against Germany." The Army, by contrast, under Asquith's cautious leadership as interim Secretary of State for War, was just beginning to mobilize and, in consequence of the Cabinet and country's consistent hostility during the crisis toward dispatch of the BEF, had yet to decide with regard to British military intervention on the continent.[10]

---

[7] Lloyd George, Chancellor of the Exchequer, quoted in Huguet, Britain and the War, p. 18; cf. Lloyd George, War Memoirs, I, 66-67. See Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 354-61 for the final unfolding of the crisis.

[8] See Ritter, The Sword and the Scepter, II, 216-19ff; Alexandre, Avec Joffre, p. 148.

[9] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entries of August 3, 4, 1914; CT #198, Cambon to French Minister of War, 4 August, 1914, AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 78.

French reaction to British indecision during the first days of August was one of anxiety and gloom. Colonel Yarde Buller, British Military Attaché in Paris for more than two years, described it thus:

---

[10] Asquith, *Memories and Reflections*, II, 11; Williamson, *Politics of Grand Strategy*, pp. 361-64; Churchill, *The World Crisis*, I, 197-98, 211-13, 217-19ff, 227-29; Halpern, *The Mediterranean Naval Situation*, pp. 362, 364; Arthur J. Marder, *From Dreadnought to Scapa Flow: The Royal Navy in the Fisher Era, 1904-1919* (5 vol.; London: Oxford University Press, 1961-1970), Vol. I: *The Road to War, 1904-1914*, pp. 424, 432-36. See *Ibid*, pp. 328-404 on the prewar evolution of British naval strategy and tactics.

> France prepared herself like a person doomed to the surgeon's knife with little hope of emerging from the anesthetic; when after three days of suspense, which I can personally speak of as diabolical, the news came that England was 'coming in,' it acted like the fairy wand of the story book and the spirit of an expectant victor spread over the country.[11]

The "terrible doubt" associated with the uncertain British attitude and the bitter disappointment of the French people over the non-committal British reply to Poincaré's letter to the King indeed led to a growing feeling that the term applied by the French so often in the recent past of "perfidious Albion" for Great Britain would again be justified.[12]

Great concern over British indecision was also manifested in French governmental circles.[13] Cambon in London, co-author with Delcassé of the policy of friendship with the British, was particularly distraught by the prospect of total failure of Entente diplomacy.[14] The French War Minister, keenly disappointed over British hesitations, was so relieved upon receiving news of British entry into the war that he heartily embraced the British officer carrying the message.[15]

As in most matters pertaining to the early events of the war, the French General Staff was less nervous than the Government about the British attitude.[16] British indecision and delay nonetheless raised a number of strategic problems for the French General Staff, particularly after the German invasion of Belgium.

---

[11] Yarde Buller to Kitchener, 4 February, 1915, Kitchener Private Office Papers, PRO, WO 159/10. Cf. Spears, Liaison, p. 6.

[12] Spears, Liaison, p. 13.

[13] See Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of July 30, 1914, p. 5.

[14] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entries of August 1, 3, 1914; Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 350-53.

[15] Messimy, Souvenirs, pp. 269-72.

[16] See Letter of Cambon to Delcassé, 27 August, 1914, AE, Delcassé Papers, Vol. 3, pp. 326-28.

The first difficulty was that of the ten kilometre restriction imposed by the French Government on the Army. On July 30, the day after the return of Viviani and Poincaré from Russia, the French Cabinet had decided, for the benefit of British public opinion, to avoid even the appearance of aggressive intent by ordering French troops not to advance beyond ten kilometres from the German border.[17] That measure brought the political and military points of view into immediate conflict.

Indeed, as early as July 27, with arrival of the news of Austrian mobilization against Serbia, Joffre had come to the conclusion that war was at hand.[18] His chief concern thereafter, in common with his European military counterparts, was not to avoid war, but, with little consideration for the political implications of his acts, to prevent the enemy from gaining an initial advantage.[19] Consequently, although accepting in principle the ten kilometre restriction, Joffre loudly protested at once that it exposed valuable heights of land in the Vosges to the enemy and should be rescinded with the first German violation of the border.[20] In the same vein, he pressed on July 31 for general mobilization on the grounds that the enemy was already mobilizing covertly and, reflecting his plan for an immediate battle on the frontiers, argued that every delay of twenty-four hours would mean the loss of fifteen to twenty kilometres of national territory. As Commander-in-Chief, he could not accept responsibility for such a loss, he said, in a veiled threat of resignation.[21]

---

[17] Pichot-Duclos, Réflexions, p. 181; Spears, Liaison, pp. 9-10; Huguet, Britain and the War, p. 18; Alexandre, Avec Joffre, p. 16.

[18] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 210-11; Pichot-Duclos, Réflexions, pp. 178-79.

[19] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 207; see also Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 16. Cf. Ritter, The Sword and the Scepter, II, 247-75.

[20] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of July 30, 1914, p. 5.

The French Cabinet, still firmly in control, ordered general mobilization on August 1, but reiterated its instruction on the ten kilometre zone, aimed explicitly at "assuring the collaboration" of the British.[22] Not satisfied, however, Joffre renewed his objections to the restricted zone on August 2, again arguing that it exposed important strategic positions to the enemy. This time the Cabinet, convinced that war was at hand, relented, marking the beginning of its eclipse before the military authority. On the understanding that no French forces would cross the border, thus putting full responsibility for the opening of hostilities on Germany, the Cabinet removed the ten kilometre restriction, and in view of German violation of the French border, gave the Commander-in-Chief designate full liberty of action for the execution of his plans.[23] Without real significance for future operations,[24] the ten kilometre incident nonetheless demonstrated the value attached by the French Government to British participation in the conflict. It also marked the transition of effective military power from the hands of the Government to the General-in-Chief.

---

[21] Memorandum for the Ministère de la Guerre, 31 July, 1914, AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 17; Berthelot, Diary, A#1; Spears, Liaison, p. 11. See also Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 1, 1914, p. 7; Memorandum [to the Government], August 1, [1914], AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 22.

[22] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 1, 1914, p. 7; T 197 3/11T and T 209 3/11T, Ministère de la Guerre to Commanders of 2nd, 6th, 7th, 20th and 21st Army Corps, August 1, 1914, AFGG, I(I) A(I), nos. 25, 26, and n. 1, p. 66.

[23] AFGG, I(I), 80-81; Memorandum of Chief of General Staff, 2 August, 1914, AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 28; Telephone communication from Minister of War to Belin, 2 August, 1914, AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 27; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 2, 1914, p. 10.

[24] Alexandre, Avec Joffre, p. 116.

The crucial strategic problem for the French General Staff, once mobilization had begun, centred on the defence of Belgium. On August 2, news of the German violation of Luxembourg and a heavy concentration of German forces at Trêves on the Luxembourg border convinced the French General Staff that German invasion of Belgium was imminent. The French General Staff still firmly believed the German Army, whose reserve formations they totally discounted for offensive action, was incapable of more than a minor sweep across Belgian territory below the Belgian Meuse. Even a minor violation of Belgian territory, however, would place the BEF, with its forward concentration zone, in a position to join with the initial action of the French left wing.[25] The BEF, as in Wilson's fondest dreams, would thus be placed in position to strike a vital blow on the outer flank of the German Army. The small British Force, which the French Staff had casually cast in a contingent role on the French left wing in prewar plans, thus came to occupy a vital position in French defence.

In consequence, timing of the British arrival became a matter of serious concern. The forward position of the British concentration zone on the left flank of the French Armies demonstrated that the French General Staff still laboured under Wilson's misleading assurance that Great Britain, if she came in at all, would do so at the same time as the

---

[25] See Joffre, Mémoires, I, 231-32, 234-35, 249-50; Desmazes, Joffre, p. 80; cf. Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 1, 1914, pp. 8-9 and "Extract of a Memorandum prepared for General Joffre in February, 1914," A#54-55, which indicates that by February, 1914, the hypothesis of a wide German sweep across Belgium was beginning to cause some anxiety to the French General Staff.

French.[26] The French Staff, anxious about British indecision as early as July 30, thus became seriously concerned on August 2 and 3 when the German violation of Belgium was clearly foreshadowed but the British had not yet decided for war.[27]

Anticipating the German invasion of Belgium, Joffre decided on August 2 to strengthen the French left wing. As a result, he ordered a prearranged variant in the mobilization scheme which provided for insertion of the Fourth Army in the line between the Fifth Army on the extreme left and the Third Army centred on Verdun. To avoid encroachment on the British concentration zone, nonetheless, the Fifth Army was extended only slightly to the north.[28] On August 3, Joffre further ordered two French divisions from Algeria and Morocco to the French left. He also made provision for later transfer of two corps from Lorraine to the left wing once their concentration was complete and lateral railway movements again became possible.[29] The French thus hedged their bets against uncertain British participation by preparing for the redeployment of French troops by rail, much as was done later in the "Marne manoeuvre."[30] These measures corresponded to the prewar hypothesis of a narrow German violation of Belgian territory, which the French planned to counter by an attack across the Ardennes. They in no way responded to the danger of a wide German sweep across Belgium which would later come as a "complete surprise" to the French Command.[31]

---

[26] Spears, Liaison, p. 13. Both Henry Wilson and Sir John French affirmed at the war council of August 5, 1914, French expectations that mobilization of the two forces would be simultaneous. (Secretary's notes of a War Council held at 10 Downing Street, August 5, 1914, PRO, Cab 42/1/2.)

[27] Berthelot, Diary, I, entries of July 30, August 1, 1914, pp. 5, 7; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 234-35.

[28] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 234-35; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 1, 1914, pp. 8-9; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 52-53; AFGG, I(I), Maps, #8, 9.

[29] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 234-36; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 1, 1914, pp. 8-9; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 53.

[30] See Contamine, La revanche, pp. 162-63.

The rapid march of events in London soon removed for the French Staff all doubts about the British attitude. On August 3, Joffre was informed of the German ultimatum to Belgium which inspired the hope that the Germans would "this time raise against themselves the whole of England, who would feel directly threatened."[32] Upon learning of the British naval pledge of August 2 to defend the French Channel ports, Joffre inquired further on August 3 into the orders given to the British Fleet. Having satisfied himself that the British Navy had in fact received orders to defend the French ports, he had "no further doubt" that Britain would support France both at sea and on land, because, unaware of the nuances of British defence policy, "it seemed impossible, in such a conflict, that a country like England should fight half a war."[33] Little did he know that Churchill had readied the Royal Navy largely on his own initiative and that the Cabinet had still not decided for war. Although the British appeared to "have much trouble deciding," in French eyes there was virtually no doubt on August 4, when French authorities learned of British popular response to the invasion of Belgium, that Britain would intervene on the French side. The French Staff also learned that British mobilization had been set for the next day.[34] On August 5, the good news was received of the British decision for war, bringing the period of French apprehension and doubt to a final close.[35] French diplomacy and mutual interest had triumphed in the end. The French now had a new ally in their life and death struggle with the German Empire.

---

[31] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 150-60, 250; Desmazes, Joffre, p. 80. The two corps to be transported to the left were the XVII and IX Corps which, except one division of the IX Corps, ended up in the Fifth and Fourth Armies respectively. (Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 53.)

[32] Alexandre, Avec Joffre, p. 117; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 236.

[33] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 234-36.

The three days' delay in British mobilization behind that of the French nonetheless raised the significant strategic question of whether the first major battles on the French left should be delayed in order to allow for participation of the BEF. According to Schedule D, the timetable for the arrival of the British Force, all six British divisions were expected to complete their staging in Northern France sixteen days after the beginning of British mobilization.[36] As British mobilization was ordered for August 5, the French Staff assumed that British concentration would be complete sixteen days later, that is to say, on August 21st. Joffre, however, intended, according to the prewar plan, to launch the French offensive on August 14 in concert with the Russian offensive in East Prussia.[37]

---

[34] Alexandre, Avec Joffre, pp. 117-18; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 236; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 4, 1914, p. 12.

[35] See Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 5, 1914, p. 14; cf. Joffre, Mémoires, I, 241, who places receipt of this information a day later on the 6th, but the context makes it clear that it was received on August 5.

[36] "Prévisions de l'état-major de l'armée (4e bureau) relativement à la durée de la concentration W," n.d. (annexed to the GQG copy of Plan XVII), AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 7 and n. 1, p. 20. The British timetable presented to the War Council on August 5, 1914, was for concentration to be complete fifteen days after mobilization. ("Secretary's notes of a War Council held at 10 Downing Street, August 5, 1914," PRO, Cab 42/1/2.

[37] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 243-44.

The question was first taken up on August 5, the day Joffre, upon arrival with his Staff at Vitry-le-François, assumed full command of the French Armies of the Northeast.

> In a first meeting, General Joffre considers, with General Belin, Colonel Pont, head of the Third Bureau (operations) and myself, [wrote Berthelot] the consequences of the German eruption in Belgium and the delay in the arrival of the British forces. Must we await them? If so, it will probably be necessary to move the left of our forces back and to act first with our right in order to hold the German forces in the Vosges and Saar area.[38]

The initial French strategy adopted the next day was shaped along these lines: a preliminary attack in Alsace on the 7th would anchor the French forces on the Upper Rhine and prepare for the later advance through the Vosges. Italy having declared her neutrality on August 4, Alpine divisions would be used to reinforce the Vosges attack. Massive attacks from the French right and centre in Alsace and Lorraine would then be undertaken on August 14 to further draw in German forces on the French right. These attacks would synchronize with the Russian offensive in East Prussia, to be undertaken by the Russian Command on French request, with the purpose of drawing German forces to the East.[39] The main French attack would take place on the French left, in cooperation with the British, but would be delayed until the 20th to allow for the arrival of the Expeditionary Force.[40] Consideration of the date of British arrival thus played a decisive role in determination of the initial strategy of the French Command. The French in fact had already begun, as on numerous occasions later, to demonstrate considerable flexibility in their strategic planning in order to obtain a maximum return from British participation.

---

[38] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 5, 1914, p. 12.

[39] Ibid.; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 60; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 243-44. Although these decisions were taken on August 6 (Ibid.), orders for the Lorraine offensive were not issued until August 11. (Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 62.) On the reasons for an immediate Russian attack in East Prussia, see Norman Stone, The Eastern Front, 1914-1917 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975), pp. 33, 35, 45, 48; Danilov, La Russie dans la Guerre Mondiale, pp. 179-80; General Broussilov, Mémoires du Général Broussilov: Guerre 1914-1918 (Paris: Hachette, 1929), p. 50.

[40] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 243-44.

What the French Command entirely failed to appreciate, however, was that the dispatch of the British Expeditionary Force was not an automatic consequence of British mobilization but a question of "Grand Strategy" requiring a separate decision. The source of this misapprehension, which left a legacy of ill-will to hinder later cooperation in the field, is not entirely clear. Adequate warning had, in fact, been received by the French Government from London on August 4 that the British were prepared only to make war by the blockade of German ports and, further, that dispatch of the Expeditionary Force had not been envisaged because the Force was needed for the "defence of certain points" at home and because "public sentiment was not favourable to an expedition."[41] Even the telegram announcing British mobilization warned that "No order has yet been given for the concentration of units in the ports of embarkation."[42] On the other hand, Brigadier-General Wilson, who possessed a significant talent for cloaking his own opinion in the garb of official statement, "informed the French" sometime prior to August 5 that, "if the

---

[41] CT #20, Paul Cambon to Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, August 4, 1914 (Report of Interview with Grey), AE, Série "Guerre 1914-1918," vol. 534, p. 99ff. At the same time Cambon argued to Grey that public opinion was favourable to an expedition and reported that the British Government promised to examine the question. Perhaps the French War Ministry felt it best not to upset the High Command over a matter about to be settled.

[42] CT #198, Paul Cambon to Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Pour le Ministre de la Guerre, 4 August, 1914, AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 41.

British Government decided to go to war, they would send 5 Div[isions]."[43] The French Command, apparently not sufficiently alerted by the French Government to the nature of British strategic decision-making, once again trusted Wilson's misleading assurances. Based on a premature calculation of the arrival date of the British Force, Joffre's strategic plan would thus be upset by basic strategic decisions yet to be made in London.

On August 5, 1914, an historic War Council convened at 10 Downing Street in London to consider military strategy toward the continent. The concept of a naval war of limited liability presented by Grey to the House of Commons on August 3 no longer corresponded to the wishes of the public. Public opinion, which had been persistently hostile during the crisis to dispatch of the BEF to the continent, crystallized once war had been decided in favour of an expedition to the continent. According to Cambon, public opinion now "desired war with all its means." The Liberal Government, representing the least bellicose portion of public opinion, was thus obliged to reconsider its stance on continental intervention.[44] Consequently, the business before the hastily convened War Council of August 5, whose recommendations would carry great weight with the Cabinet, was to determine if the British Expeditionary Force should, in fact, be dispatched to the continent, and if so, in what strength and to what location.[45] All of the prewar concerns of the French General Staff were thus about to be answered.

---

[43] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 5, 1914.

[44] Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, p. 367; CT #203, Cambon to Ministry of Foreign Affairs (reporting an interview with Grey), August 4, 1914, AE, Série "Guerre 1914-1918," Vol. 534, pp. 39ff. For a good French statement on British unity in the war effort as a result of the "dovish" Liberals being in power, see Huguet, Britain and the War, p. 19.

The "motley gathering" which convened on August 5 consisted essentially of the Army Council and Committee of Imperial Defence combined with several noted soldiers added for good measure. In addition to the four most powerful Cabinet Ministers, Asquith, Grey, Churchill and Haldane, War Secretary designate, a full dozen soldiers had been convoked, including such notables as Lord Roberts, Kitchener, French, Wilson, Haig and Douglas, Chief of the Imperial General Staff. Also present was Prince Louis of Battenberg, First Sea Lord, and Maurice Hankey, Secretary to the CID, who acted as secretary to the Council. The meeting, following informal Liberal practice, had no fixed agenda and wandered considerably.[46]

Asquith chaired the meeting. Britain having entered the war, the dominant view of the military men on the strategic question was that the BEF should be dispatched to France at once as arranged in prewar staff talks with the French. A suggestion of landing the Force at Antwerp, made by its designated Commander, Sir John French, was discussed and promptly discarded. No staff plans had been made for such a landing; the upper end of the Channel was not deemed entirely safe by the Admiralty for the ferrying of soldiers; and, the mouth of the Scheldt being

---

[45] "Secretary's notes of a War Council held at 10 Downing Street, August 5, 1914," PRO, Cab 42/1/2. A very full account is also given in Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 5, 1914. For an account of the background to the War Council and the forces at work, see Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 362-66.

[46] "Secretary's notes of a War Council held at 10 Downing Street, August 5, 1914," PRO, Cab 42/1/2; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 5, 1914. Asquith, Memories and Reflections, II, 30; Hankey, The Supreme Command, I, 169ff, 176-77; Taylor, English History, p. 6.

Dutch, consideration had to be given to Dutch wishes. The Council thus fell back upon the prewar plan worked out in joint staff talks with the French, rejecting also a grandiose scheme advanced by Haig for concentration of the Empire's resources before intervention. The decision for immediate dispatch of the BEF to fight alongside the French was clinched by assurances from Churchill and Battenberg that the Royal Navy's complete readiness guaranteed safe transport of the Expeditionary Force across the Channel and, indeed, reduced the risk of German invasion at home to a very minimum, making it possible to dispatch five or even all six infantry divisions of the BEF to France. The Council thus ordered transports for embarkation to the continent of five infantry divisions of the Expeditionary Force.[47] Churchill's support of Wilson's prewar plan and the early mobilization of the Royal Navy thus played a significant role in the final decision.

The delay in British mobilization relative to that of the French nonetheless raised the question of whether the forward position of the Maubeuge area as designated in staff conversations was safe as a concentration zone. The suggestion of Amiens as an alternate zone received considerable military support. On Kitchener's advice, it was agreed that a French Staff officer of high rank with "full information" should be invited to converse with the British War Office the next day in order to ascertain French wishes. The question of the concentration zone and the line of future operations was thus left open for a meeting the next day.[48]

---

[47] "Secretary's notes of a War Council held at 10 Downing Street, August 5, 1914," PRO, Cab 42/1/2; Hankey, The Supreme Command, I, 169-72; Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 231-32; Douglas Haig, The Private Papers of Douglas Haig, ed. by Robert Blake (London: Eyre, Spottiswoode, 1952), entry of August 5, 1914, pp. 68-69; cf. Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 5, 1914. Wilson claims that transports were to have been ordered for the dispatch of all six divisions. For French's appointment on July 30 and subsequent advocacy of a landing on Antwerp, see Ibid., entries of July 30 and August 1, 3, 5, 1914.

A major step toward total British commitment to defence of the continent had nonetheless been taken. The War Council decision for the "immediate dispatch of the Expeditionary Force," was sanctioned by the Cabinet the next morning with little "demur," symbolic of the radical shift in public opinion toward continental intervention.[49] Although the immediate resources committed were slight and the mirage of a short war of limited liability typified by the widespread slogan of "business as usual" persisted in the public mind for some months,[50] once the British had committed their Army, the political commitment to defence of the continent was potentially unlimited. Only at a later date would the full demands of twentieth-century continental warfare, the rigours of which not even the farsighted Kitchener fully appreciated at the time, become apparent.

Anglo-French staff arrangements, not political considerations, however, had largely determined the nature of initial British intervention. As no alternate plan for landing the BEF in any other feasible location either in Belgium or on the German coast had ever been envisaged, the War Council was obliged, in order to avoid last-minute improvisation, to endorse the one plan in existence. In his failure to devise alternate plans, and as a result provide his Government with flexibility in its choices, Wilson and the Military Operations Branch of the Imperial General Staff displayed many of the same faults as the military planners of Germany and Russia, who were also bound to a single plan.[51] While the inflexible plans and rigid timetables of the German and Russian General Staffs were contributing factors to the outbreak of war,[52] Wilson's plan had almost no bearing on the British decision. On the other hand, in common with the prewar plans of the European staffs, British staff planning with the French effectively determined initial British strategy on the continent with all its attendant consequences.

---

[48] "Secretary's notes of a War Council held at 10 Downing Street, August 5, 1914," PRO, Cab 42/1/2; Hankey, The Supreme Command, I, 171-72; Haig, Private Papers, entry of August 5, 1914, pp. 68-69; cf. Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 5, 1914.

[49] Asquith to the King, 6 August, 1914, PRO, Cab 41/35/26; Asquith, Memories and Reflections, II, 31.

[50] Guinn, British Strategy and Politics, p. 35; Taylor, English History, p. 4; C. R. M. F. Cruttwell, A History of the Great War, 1914-1918 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934), p. 126. This older study still remains a classic.

On August 6 the War Council, consisting of the same members as the day previous, met a second time to conclude the business of the first meeting. The sole difference was that Kitchener, appointed Secretary of State for War earlier in the day, now began to make his titanic influence felt and indeed forced a reconsideration of prewar strategic plans. Proponent of a mass army of regulars, Kitchener was not far different from Sir Douglas Haig, also beyond the pale of prewar official thinking in his strategic approach. Both believed in the need to mobilize the resources of the Empire for a long war before massive intervention,[53] and doubtful about initial French victory, both would have preferred to have the BEF act initially as a reserve force to the French Army. As his instructions to Sir John made clear, Kitchener was not prepared, in any case, to expose the Force to substantial risk.[54]

---

[51] Cf. Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, p. 367. See Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 5, 1914. His comments on the "ignorance" of the other members of the Council must not be taken seriously in view of his own inflexible commitment to a single line of action.

[52] Ritter, The Sword and the Scepter, II, 88, 257-75; Joachim Remak, The Origins of World War I, 1871-1914 (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1967), pp. 137-38.

[53] See Haig, Private Papers, pp. 68-69, supra, p. 98.

As concern had been expressed in Cabinet that morning on the previous War Council decision to send all but one of the six infantry divisions, Kitchener proposed to the new Council that only four infantry divisions be sent to France initially, that the fifth follow when circumstances allowed, and that the sixth be held in reserve for dispatch at a later date. Despite Sir John French's impassioned argument that retention of one infantry division was adequate to meet the danger of invasion, Asquith's fear that there might be serious domestic troubles in the next fortnight as a result of the Irish situation which was bordering on civil war determined that a second division remain behind. One cavalry division was nonetheless authorized to accompany the four infantry divisions.[55] The two prewar threats to the dispatch of the entire Force, fear of invasion and the Irish question, thus carried over into the war to support Kitchener's more cautious strategic approach toward use of the BEF.

Kitchener's blundering at the War Office, moreover, with whose workings he was totally unfamiliar, resulted in a further two-day delay in the dispatch of the Force. Owing to an "unreasonable scare as to a contemplated hostile landing on the east coast," Kitchener, without regard for Wilson's carefully worked out timetable for dispatch of the Force to France, ordered troops to the eastern seacoast during the day to meet the alleged danger.[56] This interruption of railway arrangements, Wilson bitterly complained at the Council, would result in two days delay before the railway program worked out by the General Staff could be set back in motion. As concentration must not take place nearer than three days march from the enemy, the Force, he argued, would not be ready for action for another twenty days or until August 26. From this pessimistic appraisal, Sir John French concluded that concentration should not then be further forward than Amiens, to which Kitchener heartily agreed.[57] The net result of Kitchener's disruption of Wilson's plans was that the first day for embarkation of the Force was moved back two days from August 7 to August 9 and Amiens, far to the rear, in line with Kitchener's defensive strategic stance, was selected as the staging area for the Force.[58] These two decisions, which in effect would place the BEF in a reserve position, coupled with the earlier reduction of the Force, would force yet another reconsideration of French strategic planning at Grand Quartier Général.

---

[54] Ibid. See Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 12, 1914; Taylor, English History, p. 20.

[55] "Secretary's notes of a War Council held at 10 Downing Street, August 6, 1914," PRO, Cab 42/1/3; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 6, 1914; Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, p. 366. See below for Kitchener's quarrels with Wilson over the concentration zone of the BEF.

• • •

---

[56] Callwell, Wilson, I, 159-61.

[57] "Secretary's notes of a War Council held at 10 Downing Street, August 6, 1914," PRO, Cab 42/1/3; cf. Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 6, 1914. Wilson makes no mention of the Amiens decision in his Diary. His bitter comments later would suggest that he did not hear or had not taken as definitive the comments between Kitchener and French. (See Ibid., entry of August 12, 1914.)

[58] Letter, Asquith to the King, 6 August, 1914, PRO, Cab 41/35/26 R/163; Spears, Liaison, p. 31; Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 363-64. According to the timetable embarkation was to begin two days after mobilization, that is to say on the 6th (Ibid.), but as no final decision on dispatch of the Force had been taken until the 6th, the earliest possible date of embarkation without Kitchener's disruption of the schedule would have been August 7.

By August 6, all the prewar concerns of the French General Staff on initial British participation had been answered, but the French Command was much disturbed by the reduction in the size of the Force. "After their hesitation to take up action on our side, and the time lost in deciding the mobilization of their forces," wrote Berthelot in his diary on August 7, expressing the dominant sentiment of the French Command, "the British Government reduce their cooperation to 4 infantry divisions and 5 cavalry brigades." "What are their second thoughts?" he wrote, expressing latent French suspicions. "And will we be able to count seriously on such allies?"[59]

The two decisions, for embarkation on August 9 and concentration at Amiens, which upset Joffre's initial strategy for the left wing, were even less well received and produced an energetic effort to have them overturned. Although the War Ministry in Paris had knowledge on August 7 that the transportation of British troops would not begin until August 9, Joffre and his Staff remained ignorant of that delay until two days later when Colonel Huguet, returning from London, brought news of both decisions to Grand Quartier Général.[60] Huguet, in response to Kitchener's request for the dispatch of a high-ranking Staff officer, with "full information," to convey French wishes on the zone of British concentration, had been sent to London by the French War Ministry on August 6, but had gone in such great haste that "he had no recent information of French dispositions and intentions."[61] From the British point of view, his mission was thus to no avail. Nevertheless, while in London, he was fully informed of the military decisions of the War Council and, further, was asked by Kitchener to ascertain Joffre's wish with regard to the zone of British concentration. The revised timetable which Huguet carried to GQG on his return showed concentration beginning on August 9 and ending on August 23.[62] Allowing for a three-day march forward from the new concentration zone at Amiens, the British would not be available for action until August 26, that is to say, six full days after the expected French left wing engagement with the enemy.[63]

---

[59] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 7, 1914; cf. Joffre, Mémoires, I, 263.

[60] CT #228, Cambon to Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, August 6, 1914, AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 71 indicates knowledge of the delay was communicated to Joffre verbally August 7, but Alexandre wrote on the 7th that "The English still leave us in uncertainty as to the date of the arrival of their troops." (Alexandre, Avec Joffre, p. 123.) Both Berthelot and Joffre are unanimous in declaring that they only found out the British timetable with Huguet's return on the 9th. (Berthelot, Diary, I, 24; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 255.) Apparently the verbal communication by the War Ministry of the message was defective.

Having already adjusted French strategic plans once on August 6 to allow for an initial three-day delay in British participation, Joffre was "exasperated" with what appeared to be renewed British "tergiversations."[64] As delaying the first battles of the left wing further to August 26 to allow for British participation would result in loss of initiative to the enemy, Joffre, this time, resolved to proceed with his left wing offensive as planned, with or without British support.[65] But in contrast to his quiescence during the period of initial British decision-making on the question of entry into the war and intervention on the continent, Joffre, now armed with the British decision to intervene, immediately brought to bear all the resources at his disposal to obtain a more favourable initial British strategy.

---

[61] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entries of August 5, 6, 1914. Designated in peacetime to head the Military Mission to the British Army, Huguet, who had long served as Military Attaché in London, was commanding a regiment when war broke out. (Huguet, Britain and the War, pp. 27, 31.)

[62] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 255; AFGG, I(I), p. 149; Huguet, Britain and the War, p. 39; "Dates de mobilisation de l'Armée anglaise," 9 August, 1914, AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 134; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 7, 1914; Callwell, Wilson, I, 159-61.

[63] General-in-Chief to the President of the Republic, 9 August, [1914], noon, AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 126; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 255; Alexandre, Avec Joffre, p. 123 (entry of August 9, 1914).

[64] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 9, 1914, p. 24.

Turning first to the diplomatic channel, he attempted on August 9 to have the British hasten the arrival of at least some of their Forces. Appealing to both the War Minister and the President of the Republic, Joffre urged them, in view of the political value of even limited British participation, to request that at least some British troops be pushed forward rapidly, "be it only one division," in order to allow British participation in the first great battles of the war.[66] In a more sober letter to Poincaré, Joffre argued that the support of British troops, even after the first great battles of the war, would be "of great importance in the development of later operations," presumably for the exploitation of victory, "on condition that their arrival was not too long delayed."[67] The Government was in full accord and immediately relayed Joffre's requests to London, but without tangible results.[68] By evening, the War Office had replied categorically that any change in the transportation plan was virtually impossible and "would only cause disorder and resulting delays."[69] Joffre's first use of the diplomatic channel, in response to British strategic decision-making, thus came to nought.

---

[65] #297, Commander-in-Chief to President of the Republic, 9 August, [1914], *AFGG*, I(I) A(I), no. 141; Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 255-56.

[66] Messimy to La Panouse, 9 August, 1914, 7:45 a.m., *AFGG*, I(I) A(I), no. 122. Messimy merely stated Joffre's desiderata.

[67] #297, General-in-Chief to the President of the Republic, 9 August, [1914], noon, *AFGG*, I(I) A(I), no. 124; Berthelot, *Diary*, I, entry of August 9, 1914, pp. 24-25; Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 255-56.

[68] See Poincaré Papers, XXXVI, "Notes Journalières," *BN*, NAF (16027), entry of August 9, 1914; cf. Poincaré, *Au service*, V, 45-46.

In consequence, the old image of the British as "slow" and "late" was further reinforced in the minds of the French General Staff. "The British are hardly in a hurry," wrote Berthelot on August 9.[70] A member of the Third Bureau also noted his disappointment at British delay, which he wrongly attributed, in a later analysis, not to the vicissitudes of British politics but to muddling British mentality and temperament.[71] The image of the British as "slow" and "late" had already become a sufficient explanation for the delay.

The reply from London, based on technical considerations, was essentially the same as that given by Joffre to his own Government on August 5, four days earlier, in response to the Belgian Government's urgent request for military support. No effective help could be given the Belgian Army, he said, for French concentration plans could not be disrupted in mid-course.[72] Although an officer was dispatched to Brussels to establish liaison with the Belgian Command, only French cavalry on the French left were ordered forward to establish contact with Belgian forces at Tirlemont on August 16, Joffre being unwilling even at that late date to disperse his forces for the sake of the Belgians.[73]

---

[69] CT #247, Cambon to Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, 9 August, 1914, received 9:30 p.m., AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 123; French, 1914, p.7.

[70] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 9, 1914, p. 24.

[71] Alexandre, Avec Joffre, pp. 123-25.

[72] Messimy, Souvenirs, pp. 297-98; Berthelot, Diary, I, entries of August 5, 6, 1914, pp. 13, 17-18.

[73] AFGG, I(I), pp. 93, 309; Messimy, Souvenirs, pp. 303, 306-08.

The French Command opposed the proposed British detrainment at Amiens even more energetically than the new timetable.[74] Such a rearward concentration, from which Kitchener intended to deploy his forces only after a preliminary period of rest, not only upset the forward disposition of the French left but, to French irritation, ruled out British participation in the first great clash with the enemy. According to a very optimistic calculation on the part of Huguet, however, British combattant units would arrive two days before the arrival of their supply columns on August 23, and the British would thus be able to advance on August 21, just one day after the French offensive planned for August 20. Although maintenance of the original concentration zone allowed the British absolutely no margin of safety, even in the event of a minor German sweep across Belgium as the French still anticipated, Joffre instructed Huguet to insist with the British on his return to London that the original concentration zone be maintained in order to prevent the total ruination of the French plan.[75]

---

[74] Spears, Liaison, p. 31; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 262; AFGG, I(I), p. 149. Cf. Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of 12 August, 1914. Wilson claimed that Kitchener's statement that Amiens had been approved by the Cabinet as the zone of concentration on August 6 and that Huguet "and everyone" else had been told this, was a lie. (Ibid.) Although the Cabinet minutes for the meeting of August 6 are not available, Hankey's minutes of the War Council of August 6 show that Kitchener and French were in agreement on Amiens as the zone of concentration. ("Secretary's notes of a War Council held at 10 Downing Street, August 6, 1914," PRO, Cab 42/1/3.) Corroborating evidence is found in French's instructions approved by the Cabinet which states: "The place of your assembly, according to present arrangements, is Amiens." The exact date of those instructions, however, is lacking and is given only as August 1914 in HGW (1914), I, Appendix 8, 499-500. These instructions appear to have been issued shortly after the August 6 meetings. (Ibid., p. 29; Maurice, Lessons, pp. 6-7.)

[75] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 262; cf. Huguet, Britain and the War, pp. 40-41; AFGG, I(I), p. 150; "Dates de mobilisation de l'Armée Anglaise," 9 August, 1914, Ibid., I(I) A(I), no. 134; see Spears, Liaison, p. 31.

Maintenance of the original zone was a risky and audacious move even on the basis of the information then available. It would prove doubly hazardous, in the event, as the ten or eleven German Army Corps in Belgium, of which the French had knowledge at that time, proved to be but the avant-garde of the twenty German Army Corps and cavalry reserved for a wide sweep across Belgium extending far to the left of the small British Force on the French left flank.[76] Even though one further day was ultimately gained on the British transportation schedule as a result of the smaller forces sent,[77] making British concentration "virtually complete" except for supply columns by August 20,[78] the British, in their forward position, would encounter superior German forces but two days later on August 22.[79]

The great task of obtaining approval for the old concentration zone and thus of reversing Kitchener's initially defensive strategy for the BEF fell to Huguet, who, in the company of two other French officers, arrived in London on August 12. Though very pessimistic on August 6 about the possibility of forward British deployment, the francophile Wilson became an immediate convert to the French plan. Armed with "all the German and French dispositions," such as they believed them to be, Wilson and the French officers then "went into the whole situation" with Sir John French with the result that "Sir John plumped for a concentration in our old area."[80] As on many later occasions, the persuasive and optimistic Wilson here demonstrated his capacity to convince Sir John French, but Kitchener, who now had strategic direction of the war, possessed a "great will" and, being "excessively headstrong," could not be persuaded easily. This was especially true as the French request was diametrically opposed to his basic strategy, which, for reasons already explained, was to prepare a solid base on the Somme for the British Force, and then to advance only after an initial German onslaught against the French.[81]

---

[76] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 261, 266; Berthelot, Diary, I, August 14, 1914, p. 34; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 35; cf. Huguet, Britain and the War, pp. 38-39. See below, p. 157.

[77] Cf. "Prévisions de l'état-major de l'armée (4^e bureau) relativement à la durée de la concentration W," n.d., (annexed to the GQG copy of Plan XVII), AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 7 and n. 1, p. 20.

[78] HGW (1914), I, 50.

[79] Spears, Liaison, p. 31; Huguet, Britain and the War, pp. 24-25.

Sir John, Murray, Wilson and the three Frenchmen, in consequence, "wrangled" with Kitchener fruitlessly for three hours on the afternoon of August 12, trying to persuade him to accept the original concentration zone. Relations between Wilson and Kitchener had already deteriorated badly because of a serious row on August 7 over Wilson's communication of British plans to the French without permission and Kitchener's planned reorganization of the Aldershot command which would further disrupt Wilson's nigh sacred timetable. The meeting was thus very heated. As Wilson recorded in his diary, Kitchener "wanted to go to Amiens and he was incapable of understanding the delay & difficulties of making such a change [concentration at Amiens] nor the cowardice of it, nor the fact that in either French victory or defeat we would be equally useless." A better judge of German intention than either Wilson or French, Kitchener continued to argue that the Germans would advance "north of the Meuse in great force," and thus "swamp" the British before they concentrated.[82]

---

[80] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 12, 1914.

[81] Huguet, Britain and the War, p. 10; De la Panouse to Ministre de la Guerre, 19 August, 1914, AFGG, I(II) A(I), no. 93.

The French party nevertheless had one major point in its favour. In his suggestion on August 5 that a high-ranking French Staff officer with "full information" be invited to converse on the matter, Kitchener had shown his conviction of the need to cooperate fully with the French Command. Although Kitchener initially resisted the French request for the forward zone and even obtained Asquith's support for his stance, later in the evening he agreed, despite serious misgivings, to maintenance of the original concentration zone in the Maubeuge-Hirson-Brisigny triangle, in deference to the wishes of the French.[83]

The incident established a pattern which was to prevail throughout Kitchener's term as Secretary of State for War. A differing conception of strategy had brought Kitchener into immediate conflict with the French High Command. Superior in insight and judgment to the French, he had nonetheless on this occasion, as on many others later, finally given in to the French Command, largely because of his recognition of the need to cooperate fully with the French on strategic matters to obtain a maximum result in the field.[84] As indicated earlier, Kitchener had very grave concern about the French ability to stand alone. The

---

[82] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entries of August 7, 12, 1914; Callwell, Wilson, I, 159-61; cf. Huguet, Britain and the War, pp. 40-47.

[83] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 12, 1914; Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, p. 366; cf. Arthur, Kitchener, III, 20-23.

[84] A. J. P. Taylor's interpretation that Kitchener deferred to French strategic plans in the spring of 1915 in view of later taking to the field as Commander-in-Chief of the New Armies, at which time the French would be expected to defer to him, is not a credible explanation of his deferential attitude to the French in this early period. (Taylor, English History, p. 27.)

French Command thus obtained their desire, as on nearly every other matter during the "War of Movement," but the end result would vindicate Kitchener's original and more realistic strategic judgment. This pattern, to be repeated again and again in the course of the next twenty months of war, was one of the peculiarities of Anglo-French military relations in the Joffre-Kitchener period.

The French Command greeted the news that the original concentration zone of the British Force had been maintained with considerable satisfaction on August 13.[85] Although only four British infantry divisions and one cavalry division were to come, their forward concentration, scheduled for not later than August 23, opened anew the possibility of associating British forces with the major offensive of the French Armies of the left flank to follow close on the heels of the large diversionary attacks in Lorraine ordered for August 14. The British nonetheless would have to agree to advance on August 21 before the arrival of all their transports. Such was the hope of the French Command despite the uncertainties of the situation when, three days later, Sir John French arrived at Grand Quartier Général to make the acquaintance of the French Commander-in-Chief and to agree upon a common plan.[86]

Thus, despite the hesitations and delay in arrival of the British Force and the resultant ire and disappointment of the French Command already observed, initial French strategy adopted on August 6 to allow

---

[85] CT, Huguet to Diplomatie, Paris 294, 13/8 [1914], AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 226; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 262.

[86] See Joffre, Mémoires, I, 263-65, 270-71; AFGG, I(I), p. 151. See below for a treatment of this meeting.

British cooperation in the initial attacks of the French left had not been seriously impaired. Thanks to the good staff work of Wilson, British concentration, once begun, proceeded "up to time" and "without a hitch."[87] Thus, on August 19, the British Command, "desirous of cooperating the soonest possible" with French operations, decided, as requested by Joffre on August 16, to launch the forward movement of their army on August 21, even before the arrival of their supply column.[88] The long vigil of the French Command over the arrival of the British Forces had come to an end. The British Army would indeed participate in the first great battle of the French left.[89] The legacy of uncertainty and ill-will associated with the deployment of the BEF nonetheless would levy a heavy penalty on future relations with the French, especially with the immediate neighbour on the right, the commander of the Fifth Army, General Charles Lanrezac.[90]

Conclusions

The British decision for war on August 4, in response to German invasion of Belgium, converted the Entente Cordiale into a wartime coalition. While public opinion obliged Asquith to reconsider dispatch of the BEF to the continent, the nature of initial British intervention was determined during the War Council of August 5, 6, largely by the existence of a single inflexible plan framed by Wilson in staff conversations with the French. In consequence, although Great Britain went to war for Belgium, her Forces went to fight in France alongside the French Army. By the decision to support the French directly, the British exposed themselves to the full demands of continental warfare and, as a consequence of intervening with limited forces in support of the stronger land forces of the French, became fully liable to the pressing demands of French strategic planning.

---

[87] T F. French to Secretary of State for War, 17 August, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/2; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 17, 1914; Huguet, Britain and the War, p. 53.

[88] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 278-80, 273-74, n. 1, pp. 274-75; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of 19 August, 1914; Huguet, Britain and the War, p. 28.

[89] Cf. Joffre, Mémoires, I, 279-80.

[90] See below, Chapter IV.

Until the British decision to intervene had been made, however, the prewar pattern of French strategic planning in response to British policy and strategy prevailed. In his authoritative study of the Anglo-French Entente prior to the war, Williamson has pointed out that British prewar policy played an "important, negative role in the formulation of French strategy," notably in preventing Joffre from developing his favoured plan of attack across Belgium.[91] What has not been fully appreciated to date is that the basic factor in the initial formulation of French field strategy in August, 1914, was consideration of the strategic value of associating the British Expeditionary Force with the left wing of the French Army in the first great battles of the war. Thus, to accommodate the three-day delay in British mobilization, the French Command decided on August 6, after launching a preliminary attack in Alsace on August 7, to strike a massive diversionary blow in Alsace and Lorraine on August 14 in conjunction with the Russian offensive in East Prussia, but to delay the decisive attack of the French left wing until August 20 to allow for British participation. The French thus demonstrated considerable flexibility in their strategic planning, then as later, in their desire to obtain a maximum return from British participation.

---

[91] Williamson, Politics of Grand Strategy, p. 218.

The French Command, however, not bothering to consult the British, had drawn up their strategic plan largely on the basis of misleading information provided by Wilson, who had earlier assured the French, on very dubious grounds, that dispatch of five of the six infantry divisions of the BEF would automatically follow the British decision for war. The French Government, moreover, though fully informed, failed to advise the French Command on August 4 that no decision had yet been made on dispatch of the BEF. Joffre and the French Staff, in consequence, framed their strategic plan prematurely and under false expectations only to learn that Kitchener, after his appointment as Secretary of State for War on August 6, had forced a reconsideration of British strategy. Advocate of an initially defensive stance for the BEF, Kitchener was at least partially responsible for reduction of the Expeditionary Force by one division and, as a result of his stumbling disruption of the transportation timetable, which caused a two-day delay in dispatch of the Force, directly responsible for the decision to deploy the Force at Amiens in a reserve capacity to the French Army. These decisions brought this new master of British strategy into direct confrontation with Joffre, who performed the same function for the French.

Ultimately, Joffre's initial strategy emerged unscathed. Unable for technical reasons to accede to his request for an acceleration of the transportation schedule, Kitchener nonetheless gave way on his demand for maintenance of the original forward concentration zone for the BEF, not because he was convinced of the wisdom of French strategy, but because, conscious of French weakness, he was fully convinced of the need to support the French Army by cooperating with French plans. This pattern of acceding to French wishes would continue throughout Kitchener's period of office, greatly enhancing French control of the overall strategic direction of the coalition. The additional three days' delay in dispatch of the BEF, one the result of renewed discussion of the War Council on August 6 and two in consequence of Kitchener's disruption of the timetable, were effectively recovered by military means. One day was pared off the timetable because of the smaller force dispatched and the other two were absorbed by the magnanimous British offer to advance two days early, on August 21, before arrival of their supply columns.

A legacy of ill-will nonetheless persisted. The old image of the British as "slow" and "late," hurtful to future relations, was reinforced in French minds. The delay in British arrival, moreover, was the primary cause of Lanrezac's initial ill-humour toward the British and much of his later misunderstanding with Sir John French. From the British military point of view, once dispatch of the Expeditionary Force had been decided, everything proceeded marvellously well and on time.[92] The British Command therefore seriously resented complaints about the lateness of their arrival by Lanrezac and others, who understood little of British politics, which in fact had delayed embarkation of the Force.[93]

The arrival of Sir John French in Paris on August 15 marked the beginning of a new stage in Anglo-French military relations. Until that point, the concern of the French Command had been with British entry into the war, the size of the Expeditionary Force, the date of its arrival, and, unexpectedly, its zone of concentration. All of these concerns, except that of the concentration zone, had been major preoccupations of the French Staff before the war. The outcome in each case had depended on the political decisions of the British Government, to which all eyes had been drawn. These questions having been resolved, attention shifted to the field. While the early advance of British Forces remained a major concern, the very crucial question of joint operational planning, and coordination of the movements of contiguous armies, hardly anticipated in prewar planning because of the uncertainty of British participation, assumed the spotlight. These questions now had to be resolved in France with the British High Command.

---

[92] See French, 1914, p. 55.

[93] See Huguet, Britain and the War, p. 62; cf. Spears, Liaison, pp. 75-76.

CHAPTER IV

THE FAILURE OF FRENCH STRATEGY

CHARLEROI AND MONS, AUGUST 21 - 24, 1914

Sir John French arrived in Paris on August 15, 1914. He was warmly cheered by crowds in the streets who believed the British Expeditionary Force had landed and was "all ready to fight."[1] Sir John first met with Poincaré, Messimy and Viviani to discuss the military situation and was impressed with the French President's optimistic assessment of the prospects for a victorious advance and the reported calm and determination of the French nation.[2] Poincaré, on the other hand, was less impressed with Sir John, whom he caustically described as "rather small of stature, not very martial in aspect," "calm, cold, methodical," "slow," and hardly able to speak French.[3] Most of all Poincaré was disappointed to learn that British troops would not be ready to advance before August 25 and therefore would not "take part in the first battle."[4] The British Commander-in-Chief then proceeded to the War Ministry where the military situation was further reviewed and arrangements made to meet Joffre the next day.[5]

---

[1] Huguet, Britain and the War, p. 49; French, 1914, pp. 31, 33; Poincaré Papers, XXXVI, BN, NAF (16027), "Notes Journalières," entry of August 15, 1914.

[2] Sir John French, Earl of Ypres, Some War Diaries, Addresses and Correspondence of Field-Marshal The Right Honourable The Earl of Ypres, ed. by Gerald French (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1937), entry of August 15,1914, p.145 (hereinafter cited as French, Diaries); French, 1914, p.33.

[3] Poincaré Papers, XXXVI, BN, NAF (16027), "Notes Journalières," entry of August 15, 1914.

[4] Ibid.

The visit of Field Marshal French and his senior advisors Murray and Wilson to Grand Quartier Général at Vitry-le-François on August 16 set Anglo-French military relations off to a good start. After a very warm welcome by the French Command, at which Joffre and Sir John met for the first time, Joffre enthusiastically showed the first captured German standard, which had arrived a few minutes earlier, to the British generals. During the ensuing three-hour discussion, attended by Belin, Berthelot, Sir John, Murray and Wilson, Joffre outlined the military situation, the proposed French plan of operations, and the role he wished the British to play in it.[6]

Sir John, however, was not prepared to accept French direction without demur and immediately raised the question of command relations, which prewar staff conversations had failed to regulate. That failure indeed was the greatest weakness of prewar talks and would be the source of much difficulty in Allied relations through nearly the entire war, until the adoption of a unified command under Foch in March, 1918, provided a partial solution. According to his instructions, Sir John asserted pointedly, his was an "independent" command.[7] The imperious Joffre was clearly taken aback by this disconcerting revelation and was immediately concerned about the difficulty of coordinating the Allied left wing in the absence of a unified command.[8] But faced with the task of obtaining purely voluntary British cooperation, Joffre attempted to establish as confiding a relationship as possible. His initial impression, reflecting the substance of Kitchener's instruction to Sir John, was that the British Commander would be a "loyal comrade at arms, [but] attached to his ideas, and although bringing us his support, careful not to compromise his army."[9]

---

[5] French, Diaries, entry of August 15, 1914, p. 145.

[6] Numerous accounts of this meeting are extant. See Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 16, 1914; French, Diaries, entry of August 16, 1914, pp. 145-46; French, 1914, pp. 34-35; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 270-71; Huguet, Britain and the War, pp. 49-50.

[7] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 270. Joffre is the only authority who mentions this, but it is too much in character to be denied.

The field strategy presented to the British on August 16 was essentially that drawn up by the French Command on August 6 to allow for an initial three-day delay in British arrival. The massive diversionary attack in Lorraine, to be undertaken at the same time as the Russian advance into East Prussia, had already begun on August 14.[10] The decisive attack on the French left wing, to be launched a few days later in order to take advantage of British participation, had yet to be arranged.

Joffre's strategic plan, however, was based on French prewar conceptions and a purblind interpretation of sparse intelligence, and as a result was grossly out of touch with reality.[11] Neither the news of thirteen German army corps in Belgium and Luxembourg[12] nor information received on the 14th that German reserve units had crossed the Meuse above Liège serve to alert the French Command as to the true nature of the Schlieffen Plan which would send four strong armies in a wide wheeling movement across Belgium and northern France. Blinded as to the intended use of German reserves for offensive warfare and therefore unable to shake off the prewar conception of a minor German violation of Belgian territory, Joffre, along with Berthelot, continued to believe a German attack in strength above Namur quite unlikely. The German reserve units reported north of Liège Joffre assumed were directed solely against the Belgian Army.[13] In reality, they proved to be detachments of the German First Army (consisting of five army corps and three cavalry divisions) under von Kluck whose advance, delayed until the fall of the forts north of Liège on August 14, would lead them well beyond the left wing of the BEF.[14] The strength and location of that army would come as a complete surprise to the French Command during the "Battle of the Frontiers."

---

[8] Ibid. That Joffre was troubled by his lack of control over Sir John is evidenced by the fact that on August 23, prior to Allied retreat from the frontiers, Joffre ordered two French divisions forward on the British left in order to give the French Commander greater control over British movements. (Joffre, Mémoires, I, 301.)

[9] Ibid., p. 270. Some of this may have been hindsight.

[10] The Russian advance, in effect, did not begin until the 17th. See Cruttwell, The Great War, pp. 17-18, 43; cf. Joffre, Mémoires, I, 263-64.

[11] Cf. Cruttwell, The Great War, p. 17 with Joffre, Mémoires, I, 265-67ff.

[12] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 16, 1914.

Nor was the French Command amenable to advice from more perceptive observers. General Charles Lanrezac, for example, who commanded the French Fifth Army on the left wing next to the British, argued correctly at GQG on August 14-15 that the Germans were planning a large wheeling movement across Belgium and, in consequence, requested that his own Army be allowed to extend leftward into the concentration zone of the BEF, a force in which he had very little confidence. The excitable behavior of

---

[13] See Joffre, Mémoires, I, 265-67; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 63.

[14] Huguet, Britain and the War, p. 62; Général von Kuhl, Le Grand Etat-major allemand avant et pendant la guerre mondiale, commented by General Douchy (Paris: Payot, 1922), pp. 139-40; AFGG, I(I), 326-27, 339.

Lanrezac, who, in addition to challenging official thinking, "scoured the offices shouting and waving his arms," was little appreciated at GQG, and his proposed extension to the left, seen as premature, was limited so as not to impinge on the British zone.[15] Likewise, the Third Bureau recommendation on August 15 that a new French Army be formed on the British left to meet the thrust of the three German armies believed to be forming north of the Metz-Thionville complex was refused. In the absence of absolute proof to the contrary, the French High Command continued to cling to the prewar concept of a minor German violation of Belgian territory, and under the influence of Berthelot, the great high priest of frontal assault, it opted for a strong offensive in the heavily wooded Ardennes against what they believed to be the German centre.[16]

The French Command, in fact, was very optimistic about the prospects of an offensive. With the addition of British forces, they would be able to deploy fifteen army corps and two groups of reserve divisions (roughly the equivalent of two army corps) against thirteen German army corps, thus attaining a marked superiority in numbers. While the Third and Fourth Armies were to launch the major attack in the Ardennes toward Metz, the French Fifth Army, centred on Mezières, would extend its left to Maubeuge and advance across the Sambre to meet whatever German elements crossed the Meuse. The BEF would coordinate its movements with the Fifth Army and move forward from Maubeuge to Mons to fall on the enemy flank.[17] Wilson's prewar dream of decisive British action appeared about to come true.

---

[15] Berthelot, Diary, I, entries of August 14, 15, 1914, pp. 34-35 and A #18, Lanrezac's letter to General Joffre, August 14, 1914, pp. A19-20; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 267-69; AFGG, I(I), 326-27. See Général [Charles] Lanrezac, Le plan de campagne français et le premier mois de la guerre (2 août - 3 septembre 1914) (Paris: Payot, 1921), pp. 76-81.

[16] Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 63-66; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 15, 1914, p. 36.

For the full realization of the plan, however, the British would be required to move forward on August 21 in conjunction with the Fifth Army. When asked if British forces would be ready on that date, as Huguet had earlier calculated, Sir John replied that no major advance could take place before the 24th. Joffre nonetheless pressed for an earlier start, and, very much impressed with all he had seen and heard, the British Chief promised, without making a specific commitment, that the delay would be reduced as much as possible.[18] And indeed, on August 19, although his supply columns had not yet arrived, Sir John announced to Joffre that his forces would move forward on the 21st as requested, in order to "cooperate the soonest possible" with French operations.[19] As was his habit in dealing with his own Government, Joffre handed Sir John a memorandum at the end of the initial interview summarizing the French plan of action and the role assigned in it to British forces.[20]

---

[17] French, Diaries, entry of August 16, 1914, pp. 145-46; French, 1914, pp. 35-36; #1119 "Memorandum for the Commander-in-Chief of English Forces," August 16, 1914 , AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 249; see Berthelot, Diary, A #21-22, "Instruction Particulière no. 10 aux IV^e et V^e Armées, et au C. C. Sordet," 15 August, 1914 . See also Berthelot, Diary, A #25, "Instruction Particulière no. 13 aux III^e, IV^e et V^e Armées et communiquée aux anglais et aux belges," 18 August, [1914], for the full definition of these hypotheses.

[18] #1119, Memorandum for the Commander-in-Chief of English Forces, 16 August, 1914, AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 359; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 270-71; Huguet, Britain and the War, p. 49; cf. Letter, French to Kitchener, August 17, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/11.

[19] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 278, 273-74; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 19, 1914, p. 46; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 19, 1914.

[20] French, Diaries, entry of August 16, 1914, p. 146; #1119,

A suitable beginning had thus been made in Anglo-French military cooperation. Although Sir John had affirmed his independence, he was prepared to accept French leadership, providing the role assigned to the British was recognized as purely voluntary. In the absence of any prewar accord setting forth the terms of Allied cooperation, a reasonable accommodation, though tenuous and fragile, had been worked out.

Much of Sir John's initial willingness to cooperate, quite apart from his instructions to do so, was the result of the good impression the French Staff had made on him. "They are very deliberate, calm & confident," he wrote to Kitchener, noting "a total absence of fuss & confusion and a determination to give only a just & proper value to any reported success."[21] Sir John was most optimistic about the prospect of the Allied offensive.[22] But the French strategic plan was to prove basically defective and, in consequence, by shattering Sir John's heady optimism, gravely imperil the future of Allied military cooperation.

Sir John's first encounter with Lanrezac, his immediate neighbour, whom he met on August 17 at Rethel, enroute to British Headquarters at Le Cateau, was not nearly so successful as his meeting with Joffre. Correctly interpreting the evidence of German troop concentration in Belgium, Lanrezac was already very much exercised by the danger to the French left wing. Anticipating late British arrival, he was further frustrated by

---

Memorandum for the Commander-in-Chief of English Forces," 16 August, [1914], AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 349; cf. Pichot-Duclos, Réflexions, p. 338. Joffre refused to place a cavalry division and two reserve divisions echeloned behind the British under French's command. (French, 1914, p. 35.)

[21] Letter, French to Kitchener, 17 August, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/11.

[22] French, 1914, p. 35.

the unwillingness of the French Command to allow him to extend into the British zone in the interim. "At last you're here," his Chief of Staff observed to Huguet on British arrival. "It is not a moment too soon." "If we are beaten," he continued, reflecting the views of his Chief, "we will owe it all to you."[23] Such an attitude was hardly calculated to foster cordial relations with Sir John.

Lanrezac, in fact, disliked Englishmen and had little confidence in the fighting capability of the BEF.[24] "A big man with a loud voice," he did not strike Sir John as being very "courteous."[25] A "gentleman" to the very core, Sir John, despite Joffre's glowing recommendation of Lanrezac as "the best commander in the French Army" and one on whom the British could rely for "complete support," immediately took umbrage at the French general's apparent rudeness.[26] The two personalities thus proved visibly incompatible from the very start, neither man concealing either then or later his disdain for the other.[27]

Sir John and Wilson nevertheless "had a long talk"[28] with Lanrezac, "who showed [them] his plans in detail"[29] and "arranged for cooperation in alternate circumstances."[30] No hint, however, was given by Lanrezac of a possible retreat, although he clearly had that alternative in mind.[31]

---

[23] Huguet, Britain and the War, p. 62; cf. Spears, Liaison, pp. 75-76.

[24] Maurice, Lessons, p. 8; Spears, Liaison, pp. 75-76ff.

[25] French, 1914, p. 36.

[26] Huguet, Britain and the War, pp. 51-52; cf. French, 1914, pp. 36-37. See Spears, Liaison, pp. 73-80 for a melodramatic account of the interview.

[27] See Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 100, who describes it as an "une sorte d'incompatabilite d'humeur." See Spears, Liaison, p. 76; cf. Alexandre, Avec Joffre, pp. 129-31.

[28] French to Kitchener, August 17, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/11; Spears, Liaison, p. 76 inaccurately suggests the interview lasted only from 20 minutes to half an hour.

[29] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 17, 1914. Wilson, who understood the French language well, was indeed present. This belies Spears' account which claims that Lanrezac and French were

The basic issue dividing the two commanders was the date of British advance. The imminent danger to the Allied left wing posed by German troop concentration in Belgium (which Lanrezac, unlike his superiors, fully recognized) greatly magnified in his eyes the problem of late British arrival. But Sir John, piqued by Lanrezac's rudeness, showed little willingness to make concessions and maintained, as he had initially to Joffre the previous day, that the earliest possible date for the forward movement of the BEF was August 24. Only small detachments could be pushed forward on August 21, he said, and a week would be required for the total integration of British reserves within the BEF.[32] The problem was further compounded by premature advice from Grand Quartier Général to Lanrezac that the British advance would begin on the 21st.[33] Although Sir John had agreed with Joffre to reconsider the date of his move forward, no final decision had been reached. The French Command in this instance, as in many others later, had converted a vague promise on the part of Sir John into a specific pledge, adding further confusion to the issue.

---

alone and could not communicate properly because Sir John had much difficulty with his French. (Spears, Liaison, pp. 74-76.)

[30] French to Kitchener, August 17, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/11.

[31] French, 1914, p. 36. See below.

[32] Huguet, Britain and the War, p. 51; see Spears, Liaison, pp. 76-77.

[33] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of 16 August, 1914, p. 39.

Each commander stood his own ground. Greatly distressed with the tardiness of the British, Lanrezac began to prepare his Army for a massive German assault by planning a more flexible strategic response. Immediately after Sir John's departure, he complained to French headquarters about British tardiness and, reflecting the low value he attached to the initial participation of British forces, asked if the British concentration zone might not be shifted to the rear, in order to allow for the possible retreat of his Army from the Sambre into their zone. But this renewed attempt to open the British concentration zone for a flanking manoeuvre, this time clearly defensive in nature, was once again frustrated by Joffre's Staff, who maintained their offensive stance and high hopes of initial British participation. The British zone, Lanrezac was told bluntly, was adequately protected by the Maubeuge fortress and must not be altered.[34]

Lanrezac and French also disagreed on the use to be made of the British cavalry. Lanrezac wished the British cavalry to join his own for reconnaissance purposes; Sir John wanted to maintain his cavalry as an independent force on his left, possibly as a reserve, until the arrival of a fifth British division. Sir John's view prevailed.[35] Cooperation was thus limited from the beginning. Nor was the prospect of subsequent resolution of difficulties favourable, as only one liaison officer, a plucky young British Cavalry Lieutenant, Edward Spears, had been assigned to shuttle between the two headquarters, Lanrezac having assigned Huguet the task of representing him with the British.[36]

---

[34] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 17, 1914, p. 44; Spears, Liaison, pp. 80-81 (cf. p. 77) and Appendix XII, "Report of General Lanrezac's Conversation with Sir John at Rethel, August 17, 1914"; #1211 Reply to message telephoned by General Hély d'Oissel [Chief of Staff], [Fifth Army], 17 August, 1914, AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 397.

[35] Spears, Liaison, pp. 78-79 and Appendix XII, "Report of General Lanrezac's Conversation with Sir John French at Rethel, August 17, 1914"; Huguet, Britain and the War, p. 53.

A climate of distrust and misunderstanding thus prevailed between the two Chiefs from the first interview. Sir John's optimism, however, had not been seriously impaired by his misunderstanding with Lanrezac, as witnessed by his decision on August 19 to obligingly launch his offensive on August 21 in compliance with the French request.[37] But the personality conflict between the British and French Field Commanders and Lanrezac's apparent disdain for the British, from whom he concealed his innermost designs from the outset, would persist and hinder effective cooperation in the field long after the date of the British arrival had ceased to be an issue of importance.

On August 20, Joffre gave the final order for the principal attack on August 21. French strategy, which had been presented in outline to Sir John French on his visit to Grand Quartier Général on August 16, remained unchanged.[38] News of large German forces massing north of the Meuse, received on August 18, four days after the beginning of the Lorraine offensive, merely strengthened Berthelot and the High Command in their mistaken strategic assumptions. A wide extension of the German right, reasoned Berthelot, meant the German centre was weak. The French Third and Fourth Armies advancing strongly in the Ardennes would thus have a better chance of investing Metz. Their move forward would draw the extreme right wing of the German forces inward and thus pave the way for the secondary attack of the Fifth Army and the British Force against the German right flank.[39] Instructions were therefore issued on August 21 for the joint attack on the extreme left to take place the next day.[40] Such was the strategy of the French High Command which would result in the three lost frontier battles, "The Battle of the Ardennes" and the "Battle of Charleroi" fought by the French, and the "Battle of Mons" fought by the British.[41]

---

[36] See Maurice, Lessons, p. 9.

[37] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 278, 273-74, n. 1, pp. 274-75; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of 19 August, 1914, p. 46; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 19, 1914.

[38] Berthelot, Diary, I, entries of August 18, 20, 1914, pp. 42-43, 47-48; #1269, Instruction particulière no. 13 to the Commanders of the III, IV, and V Armies [communicated to the Commander-in-Chief of the British and Belgian Forces], August 18, [1914], AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 450; #1524, Ordre particulier no. 15, Commander-in-Chief to Commander V Army and Commander-in-Chief of English Forces, August 21, [1914], 7:00 a.m., AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 695.

The initial failure of French strategy on the Allied left wing, however, should not be attributed to overall want of forces or even the inferiority of Allied arms. The forces which clashed on the whole of the western front in August, 1914, were roughly equal. The Allies, with 83 infantry divisions (58 active, 25 reserve) and 12 cavalry divisions, enjoyed a slight numerical superiority over the Germans, who fielded 77 infantry divisions (45 active, 23 reserve) and 10 cavalry divisions.[42]

---

[39] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 18, 1914, pp. 43-44; no. 1267, "Instruction particulière no. 13, aux commandants des III^{e}, IV^{e} et V^{e} armées," 18 August, [1914], [communicated to Commanders-in-Chief of British and Belgian Forces], AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 450; see also testimony of General Berthelot in France, Assemblée Nationale, Chambre des Deputés Session de 1919, Procès-verbaux de la Commission d'Enquête sur le role et la situation de la metallurgie en France, Défense du Bassin de Briey (2 vols.; Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1919), Session of May 15, 1919, p. 131. (Hereinafter cited as Commission d'Enquête.)

[40] Ordre particulier no. 15, Commander-in-Chief to Commander, V Army, and Commander-in-Chief of English Forces, 21 August, 1914, 7:00 a.m., AFGG, I(I) A, no. 695.

[41] See AFGG, I(I), p. 306.

[42] Figures are from Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 28-29, 29 n. 1, who

The abundance of German heavy artillery, on the other hand, gave the Germans definitely superior fire power over the Allied forces (except perhaps the British), although in field artillery the rapid-fire French 75's outclassed the slower German 77's. The German reserve units, moreover, were better equiped, better officered and better trained than the French reserves. The French and Belgians, on the other hand, enjoyed the advantage of fortifications and fortified regions, and of fighting on home ground.[43] The better quality of German reserves, the use of heavy artillery, better field tactics and better field commanders probably played a role in German victory over the French in the Battle of the Ardennes, in which the French enjoyed numerical superiority; but the later reversal of German fortunes in the general battle on the Marne, after some tactical reeducation of the French Army and rejuvenation of its commanders, would suggest that French forces were not basically inferior to German forces in the long run. The forces on both sides therefore were more or less evenly matched, which proved to be one of the significant causes of ultimate stalemate on the western front.

Nor were the Anglo-French forces inferior in number to German forces in the decisive theatre north of the Verdun-Metz axis. The massive superiority which the Germans had hoped to obtain over the

---

cites German statistics on German forces. According to French figures the Germans fielded 82 infantry divisions on the western front. (*Ibid*.,p. 28.) Cf. Koeltz, *La guerre de 1914-1918*, pp. 40-42. In a more specific count by battalions, Contamine,*La revanche*, pp.199-202, also concludes that the forces were roughly equal on the western front in August 1914. The Allied contribution by country was: France, 73 infantry divisions (48 active,21 reserve,4 fortress) and 10 cavalry divisions; Great Britain, 4 infantry divisions plus 1 brigade, and 1 cavalry division; Belgium, 6 infantry divisions, 1 cavalry division. (Gamelin, *Manoeuvre*, pp. 28-29.)

[43] Cf. Gamelin, *Manoeuvre*, pp. 28-31. Cf. Contamine, *La revanche*, pp. 197-98; Koeltz, *La guerre de 1914-1918*, p. 41; *HGW* (1914), I, 10-11, 16, 18-19.

French in that theatre had, in fact, largely vanished due to troop movements on both sides following initial deployment. Contrary to the admonition by Schlieffen to "keep the right wing strong," Moltke had fallen bait to the large French diversion undertaken in Lorraine on August 14 and had transferred six Ersatz divisions held in reserve at Metz to this secondary theatre on August 16. The transfer of these divisions, which might have been used to reinforce the German right wing, proved to be quite needless, as the situation was restored in Lorraine by the available German forces before their arrival.[44] In preparation for his left wing offensive, on the other hand, Joffre, by the decision of August 2 and 3, had inserted the Fourth Army in the line north of Verdun, had made arrangements for the diversion of two corps from his right in Lorraine to the left wing, and also ordered the equivalent of one corps to his left from Africa (largely from Algeria). Thus, as the decisive battle approached, the French, with the aid of the British, were able to deploy north of the Metz-Verdun line 41 infantry divisions and 7 cavalry divisions against 40 German infantry divisions and an equal number of cavalry divisions.[45]

The chief cause of initial Allied defeat on the far left wing was inadequate linear deployment of forces and, to a lesser extent, lack of proper coordination between commands. With the hope of investing Metz, the French had massed the equivalent of 11 army corps in the Ardennes in their Third and Fourth Armies, against 9 German corps. Although the French Fifth Army was roughly equivalent to the German Second Army which fell upon it, its forward right flank on the Meuse was seriously threatened by the German Third Army, largely as a result of a faulty forward deployment.[46] The only really great disparity existed on the extreme left of the Allied front where only the BEF, consisting of two corps and a cavalry division, barred the route to the five corps and three cavalry divisions of the German First Army.[47] The Anglo-French forces were thus badly outnumbered on the left from the beginning, not for want of strength but because of the French bunching of forces in the Ardennes against the German centre.

---

[44] Koeltz, La guerre de 1914-1918, pp. 69-70; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 36-37. See Gotthard Jäschke, "Zum Problem der Marne-Schlacht von 1914," Historische Zeitschrift, 190 (1960), no. 2, 322ff.

[45] Germany, Reichsarchiv, Der Weltkrieg, 1914 bis 1918 (14 vol.; Berlin: E. S. Mittler & Sohn, 1925-42), Vol. I, Maps 2, 3, "Operationen der deutschen 1., 2. und 3. Armee," "Operationen der deutschen 4. und 5 Armee," 23.8.1914, um die Mittagsstunden; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 36, 53-54.

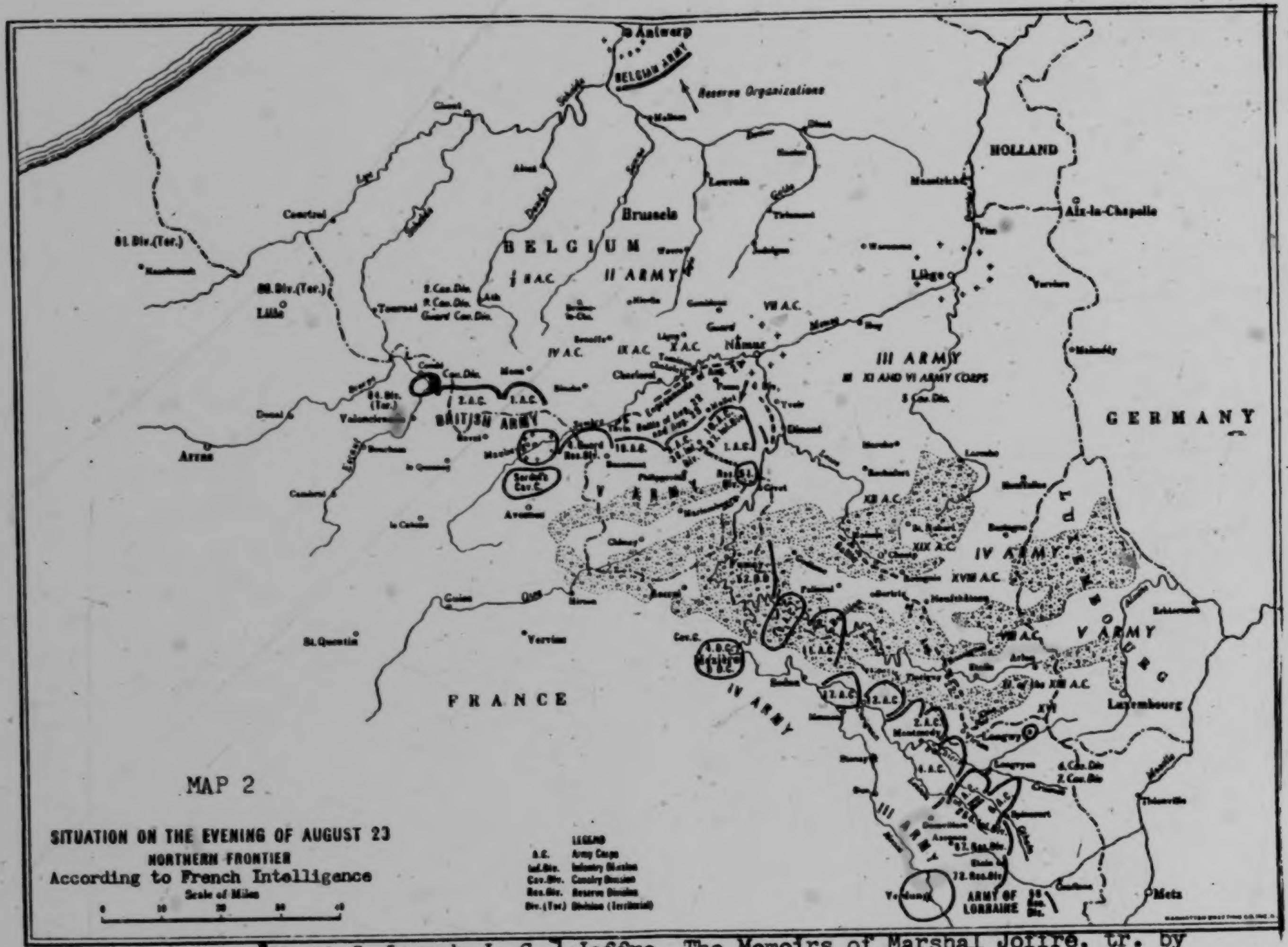
The French strategic plan thus placed the British Expeditionary Force in a hopeless military situation. Moreover, French failure to appreciate the full strength of the German right wing (until some days after the initial German attack) gave the German armies the advantage of surprise.[48] Set upon with forces more than double their size, and in

---

[46] See *AFGG*, I(I), Maps #27, "Situation des III^{e} et IV^{e} Armées le 21 août 1914 au soir," #32, "Situation de la V^{e} Armée et de l'Armée britannique le 22 août 1914 à 5 heures"; Berthelot, *Diary*, I, entry of 18 August, 1914, p. 43; Gamelin, *Manoeuvre*, p. 36; A. Goutard, *Six semaines de guerre-eclair*, Vol. I: *La Marne: Victoire inexploitée* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1968), p. 115. The French Fifth Army consisted of four Corps (two of which consisted of three divisions, but one division in each was a colonial division) and a Group of Reserve Divisions. (*AFGG*, I(I), Map #32.) The German Second Army consisted of 6 army corps, three of which were reserve units. (Gamelin, *Manoeuvre*, p. 36.) In moving the Fifth Army forward toward Namur in the angle formed by the Sambre and Meuse rivers, the French, while taking advantage of the natural defence of the two rivers, nonetheless articulated this army in a dangerous configuration, exposing its ill-protected right flank along the Meuse to enemy attack.

[47] See Huguet, *Britain and the War*, pp. 56, 62; cf. Gamelin, *Manoeuvre*, p. 36.

[48] See Wilson Diaries, V, *IWM*, DS/Misc/80, entries of August 22, 23, 1914 ff.



Antwerp
BELGIAN ARMY
Reserve Organizations
HOLLAND
Aix-la-Chapelle
Brussels
BELGIUM
II ARMY
Liège
Namur
VII A.C.
IX A.C.
IV A.C.
III ARMY
XI AND VI ARMY CORPS
GERMANY
Lille
Courtrai
Tournai
Valenciennes
Arras
Mons
Charleroi
BRITISH ARMY
I.A.C.
II.A.C.
V ARMY
IV ARMY
V ARMY
IV ARMY
III ARMY
FRANCE
St. Quentin
Vervins
Luxembourg
Longwy
Thionville
Metz
Verdun
ARMY OF LORRAINE

MAP 2

SITUATION ON THE EVENING OF AUGUST 23
NORTHERN FRONTIER
According to French Intelligence

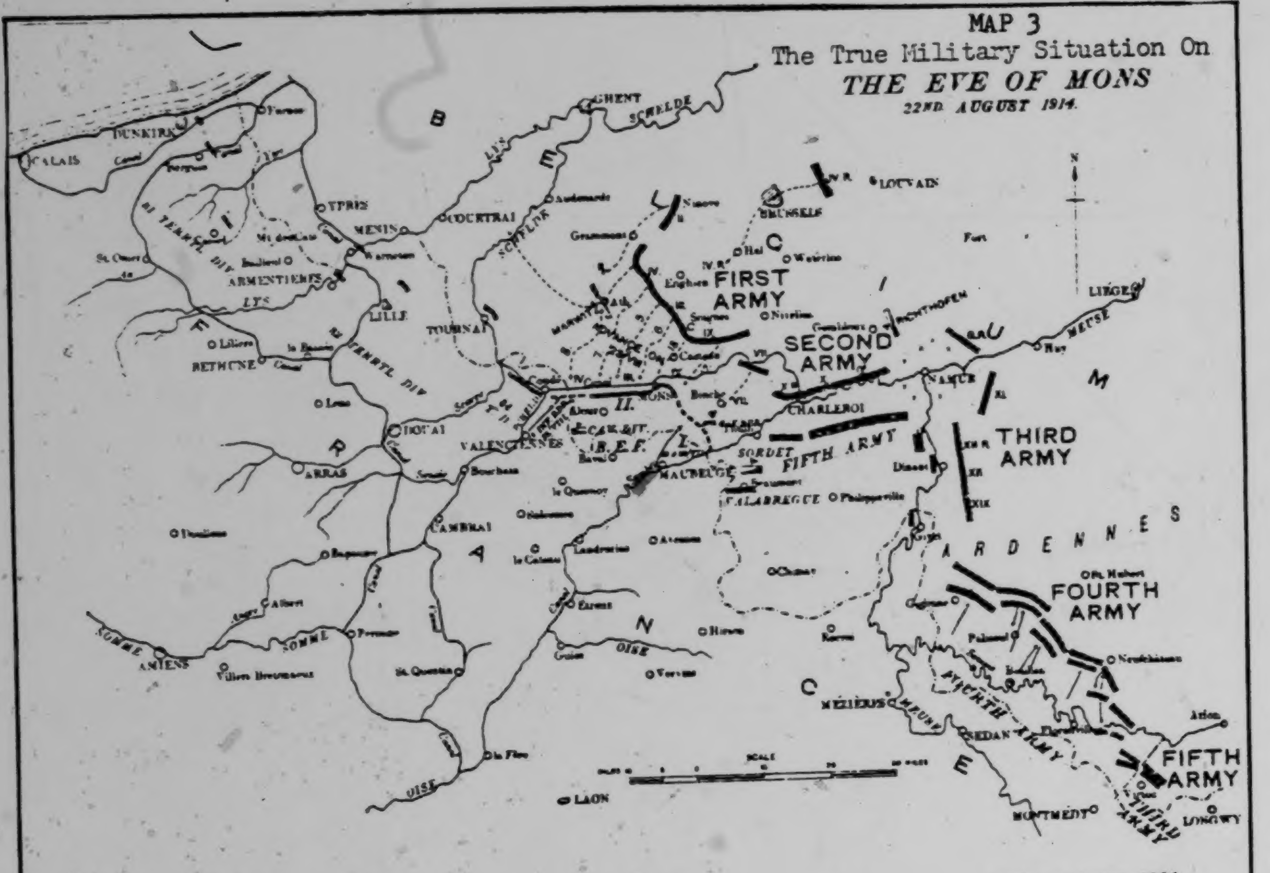
Scale of Miles
0 10 20 30 40

LEGEND

A.C.	Army Corps
Inf.Div.	Infantry Division
Cav.Div.	Cavalry Division
Res.Div.	Reserve Division
Div.(Ter.)	Division (Territorial)

Adapted from [Marshal Joseph J.-C.] Joffre, The Memoirs of Marshal Joffre, tr. by T. Bentley Mott (2 vol.; London: Geoffrey Bles, 1932), between pp. 178-79.

MAP 3
The True Military Situation On
THE EVE OF MONS
22ND AUGUST 1914.


B
E
L
G
I
U
M
F
R
A
N
C
E
ARDENNES
FIRST ARMY
SECOND ARMY
THIRD ARMY
FOURTH ARMY
FIFTH ARMY
FIFTH ARMY
FOURTH ARMY
THIRD ARMY
B.E.F.
CAV. DIV.
SORDET
VALABREGUE
TERRTL DIV
RICHTHOFEN
CALAIS
DUNKIRK
YPRES
MENIN
COURTRAI
GHENT
SCHELDE
LYS
ARMENTIERES
LILLE
TOURNAI
BETHUNE
DOUAI
VALENCIENNES
ARRAS
CAMBRAI
MONS
CHARLEROI
MAUBEUGE
NAMUR
LIEGE
MEUSE
BRUSSELS
LOUVAIN
Hal
Waterloo
Nivelles
Gembloux
Dinant
Philippeville
Chimay
Hirson
Le Cateau
Le Quesnoy
St. Quentin
Peronne
Albert
AMIENS
SOMME
OISE
La Fère
LAON
MEZIERES
SEDAN
MONTMEDY
LONGWY
Arlon
Neufchâteau
St. Hubert
Palisenl
Givet
Huy
Ninove
Grammont
Audenarde
St. Omer
Lens
Bouchain
Landrecies
Avesnes
Guise
Vervins
Rocroi
Bapaume
Doullens
Villers Bretonneux
Enghien
Soignies
Binche
Beaumont
Bavai
Condé
SCALE
N

Ordnance Survey, 1924.

Adapted from HGW (1914), I, between pp. 62-63.

the absence of effective support on either flank, the BEF would have no option but to retreat. As will be shown, the crises which followed accentuated Anglo-French friction, making the coordination of the movements of contiguous but entirely independent forces extremely difficult. The initial success of German over French strategy thus struck at the very heart of the military coalition, or, in Clausewitzian terms, at the Allied "centre of gravity."[49]

The problem of coordinating the actions of armies under independent commands was particularly evident in the Belgian case. Despite the urging of his Government, Joffre had been unwilling to diffuse his forces by a premature advance into Belgium until the moment of a general movement forward. The Belgians resisted German attack and though Liège itself fell on August 7, some of its outlying forts resisted until the 14th. But, given little more than token assistance, the Belgians were progressively thrust back by overwhelming German forces and, in the absence of prewar planning with the French, withdrew on August 19 to their last stronghold at Antwerp, despite French urging that they join up with the French left wing.[50] Franco-Belgian military coordination, in the absence of a common strategic conception and a unified command, thus consisted of little more than the exchange of messages. The German plan of defeating the Allies one at a time thus proceeded apace with the forced retirement of the Belgian Army.[51] Had the Belgians withdrawn to the Allied left, their six infantry and one cavalry divisions might have partially restored the imbalance in that theatre, but even in Antwerp the Belgians contributed directly to the Allied cause.

---

[49] For a brief account of Clausewitzian theory, see H. Rothfels, "Clausewitz," in Earle, ed., Makers of Modern Strategy, pp. 93-113. For a recent translation of Clausewitz's magnum opus, see Carl von Clausewitz, On War, Ed., tr. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

[50] For a quite good account of liaison with Belgium in August, 1914, see Messimy, Souvenirs, pp. 286-316. See also AFGG, I(I), pp. 90-91, 102-03, 134-38, 147-48, 309, 344, 436-38. For a good account of the Belgian campaign by a Belgian author, see Emile Wanty, L'art de la guerre, Vol. II: De la guerre de crimée à la blitzkrieg hitlérienne (Verviers: Marabout Universite, 1967), pp. 104-08, 127-30.

Two German corps were used to contain the Belgian Army at Antwerp. A Belgian sortie on August 24, which caused the Germans considerable anxiety for their communications, confirmed the necessity of that deployment.[52] Two other German corps, moreover, were temporarily deployed before Namur to complete its investment until their transfer to the eastern front on August 25.[53] Thus, even in defeat, the Belgian Army, standing behind its defenses, temporarily attracted superior German forces, rendering a valuable service to the Allies at a critical moment, just as the Russians were doing in the east as evidenced by the transfer of the two German corps from Namur to East Prussia.

Ironically, as battle approached on the Allied left, Joffre, who was later criticized for exercising too much personal control over his armies, left much of the task of local coordination to the commanders in the field. But the French and British Commands on the Allied left lacked that community of doctrine and approach essential for the principle of "initiative" to function properly. By leaving the responsibility for local coordination largely to the field commanders, Joffre thus unwittingly gave full scope to the misunderstanding between them and, more seriously, allowed Lanrezac's quarrel with GQG over left wing strategy to poison his relations with the British.

---

[51] Joffre simply ignored any moral responsibility to defend the Belgians. From the military point of view, however, he was wiser than Gamelin, who advanced too far into Belgium in 1940, with the result that his forces were separated by a German advance through the Ardennes.

[52] Huguet, Britain and the War, p. 62; Maurice, Lessons, p. 12.

[53] See King, The First World War, p. 24; Spears, Liaison, p. 197.

Both Lanrezac and Sir John were initially guided by ordre particulier no. 15, issued by Joffre on August 21, which instructed the Fifth Army to anchor its right on the Meuse and Namur and to cross the Sambre against the main German force. The British Expeditionary Force was to move forward to the northeast in the general direction of Soignies in coordination with the advance of Lanrezac's army. Placing much of the task of coordination on the local commanders, Joffre asked that the line of demarcation between the two forces, a constant source of later difficulty, be fixed by consultation between them, and that information gathered by each be shared with the other.[54]

Sir John was fully prepared to cooperate with the French plan. He had already given a significant gesture of good will in agreeing to move forward on the 21st even without his supply columns. Flushed with the high hopes of a successful advance in conjunction with the French, he paid little attention at the moment to Kitchener's explicit warning to avoid "participation in forward movements where large bodies of French troops are not engaged and where your Force may be unduly exposed to attack."[55] The BEF's position on the exposed Allied flank ought to have inspired some caution, but Wilson confirmed total British acceptance of the French plan and agreed, as Joffre had suggested, to cooperate fully with Lanrezac (to whom two or three officers were sent daily). Wilson, moreover, advised the French that a fifth British division would arrive on the front within a week.[56]

---

[54] Ordre particulier no. 15, Commander-in-Chief to Commander V Army and Commander-in-Chief of English Forces, 21 August, 1914, 7:00 a.m., AFGG, I(I) A, no. 695; Joffre, La préparation de la guerre, p. 38; French to Kitchener, 22 August, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/6. On the continuing difficulty with the line of demarcation, see Spears, Liaison, pp. 77-78, 96, 228-29; Lanrezac, Plan de campagne, p. 91. See also Huguet to Commander-in-Chief of V Army, 18 August, 1914, AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 460 for an instance of harmonious allocation of roads.

[55] "Instruction to Sir John French from Lord Kitchener, August 1914," HGW (1914), I, Appendix 8, p. 499; also French, 1914, pp. 13-15.

Joffre, who wished to have the British engage fully, seemed satisfied. While he acknowledged that four to six German army corps, plus reserve formations and three cavalry divisions, were apparently north of the Meuse, he insisted that the operation should go forward as planned and be vigourously pursued.[57]

Ironically, Lanrezac was much less amenable to direction from GQG than Sir John. A brilliant theoretician in his own right, a former professor at the Ecole de Guerre and much at odds with the dominant offensive concepts at French Headquarters,[58] Lanrezac simply disregarded Joffre's instructions and devised a plan of his own. In his attempt to escape from the directives of GQG lay the roots of even greater misunderstanding with Sir John. Considering the south bank of the Sambre as very favourable for the defensive, Lanrezac planned to anchor the left of his army behind the waterway, making no attempt whatsoever to support the forward movement of the British on his flank.[59] In consequence, the British, whom he suspected of staying systematically to the rear, would find themselves completely "in the air" when they advanced.[60]

---

[56] #9, Colonel Huguet, Head of the French military attached to the English Expeditionary Corps, to Commander-in-Chief, French Armies, 21 August, 1914, 4:00 p.m., AFGG, I(I) A, no. 709; cf. Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 21, 1914; French to Kitchener, 22 August, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/6. French kept Kitchener fully informed of the French battle plan and his own role in it.

[57] AFGG, I(I), 456-57.

[58] See Lanrezac, Plan de campagne, pp. 103, 105, 107-08, 117-19, 140-42; Contamine, La revanche, pp. 71-72, 174; Spears, Liaison, p. 97.

[59] Lanrezac, Plan de campagne, pp. 114-21. Spears was amazed to hear Lanrezac, upon receipt of Joffre's orders, pronounce a discourse to his intelligence bureau against the offensive in view of his strong de-

Lanrezac's plan for the right of his Army was only slightly more aggressive. In view of his exposed right flank along the Meuse, he planned to delay his advance on Namur until August 23 to allow the advancing Fourth Army to free his I Corps from flank duty on the Meuse.[61] Though perhaps good strategy for his own Army, Lanrezac's defensive-offensive plan was highly disruptive of the Allied left wing plan. It thus struck at the very hinge of the military alliance.

To make matters worse, Lanrezac failed to advise the British of his intentions. Unable to convince GQG on August 21 that his attack should be delayed until August 23 or 24 to allow for the prior advance of the British and Fourth Armies on his flanks, Lanrezac had no recourse officially but to continue talking the language of the offensive with the British. Joffre, moreover, contributed to the problem of local coordination by broadening Lanrezac's discretionary powers. Sternly rebuking him for his independent-mindedness, Joffre nonetheless gave him full liberty to decide the moment of his attack.[62] Thus, on August 21, as the British began their forward movement, Lanrezac covertly followed

---

fensive position on the south bank of the Sambre. Cf. Lanrezac, Plan de campagne, pp. 114-21.

[60] See Alexandre, Avec Joffre, entry of Friday, 21 August, 1914, p. 129 and below.

[61] See Lanrezac, Plan de campagne, pp. 114-21.

[62] #194/3, Note secrète, Chimay, 21 August, 1914, [Lanrezac to GQG], AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 759 and n. 2, p. 643; cf. Alexandre, Avec Joffre, entry of August 21, 1914, p. 129; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 21, 1914, p. 51; #1654, Commander-in-Chief to Commander Army, Chimay [Headquarters of Fifth Army], 21 August, 1914, 10:00 p.m., AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 705.

his own plan, remaining on the defensive behind the Sambre.[63]

On the morning of August 22, Sir John French, who had learned unofficially via Spears the night before that Lanrezac favoured a defensive action on the Sambre, set out for renewed consultation with his unobliging neighbour.[64] That one commendable effort to arrive at a local understanding was thwarted by the march of events and circumstances. Already on August 21, while Lanrezac was arguing for delay, von Bülow's Second Army had seized the initiative by launching an attack across the Sambre against the French Fifth Army centre and Lanrezac, to direct the battle at closer range, had moved his advanced post forward from Chimay to Mettet. Learning of this from Spears, whom he met enroute, Sir John decided, given the encumbered state of the roads, that Mettet was too far to go and turned back to his Headquarters at Le Cateau.[65] Two conceptions of field strategy thus prevailed to heighten suspicions and hinder cooperation as the two armies set their face to battle.

From the point of view of Allied relations, Sir John's conduct during the Battle of Mons was irreproachable. Moving forward rapidly on August 22, the British left, consisting of the II Corps under Smith-Dorrien, reached the line Condé-Mons by evening, where it anchored behind the Condé Canal. A division of the British right, which consisted of the I Corps under Douglas Haig, reached the Mons-Erquelinnes line in the late hours of the night and early morning of August 23. Lanrezac was kept fully informed of these movements.[66] Sir John assumed that once the Ardennes offensive of the Third and Fourth French Armies got under way, the whole Allied left would advance to the north. Sordet's three cavalry divisions were to cover the British left flank and the XVIII Corps of the Fifth Army was to advance northwest of Thuin in conjunction with the forward movement of the British right.[67]

---

[63] See below.

[64] Spears, Liaison, pp. 134-35.

[65] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 22, 1914; Spears, Liaison, pp. 135-37.

[66] HGW (1914), I, 55-56; French to Kitchener, 22 August, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/6; Situation du 18e C.A. vers 14

Lanrezac's conduct of the Battle of Charleroi on August 21-23, however, led Sir John to believe that he had been treated unfairly by both the Commander of the Fifth Army and the French Command. Indeed, the Battle of Charleroi was not the vigourous offensive action envisaged by Joffre, but a rearward action involving only half of the available forces of the Fifth Army.[68] In fact, Lanrezac, in reply to the German attack across the Sambre on August 21, merely fought a defensive battle with his two central corps (X and III) about Charleroi on the south bank of the Sambre against approximately equal numbers of attacking German forces (VII and Guard Corps) of von Bülow's Second Army. Although the centre of the French line was driven back an average of five kilometres each day, the French XVIII Corps on Lanrezac's left, to British con-

---

heures (22 août) [1914], [Report directed to V Army], AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 960 and n. 1, p. 781. This latter document proves that Lanrezac was fully informed in advance of the British move forward. Cf. AFGG, I(I), Maps #32, "Situation de la V^e Armée et de l'Armée Britannique le 22 août 1914 à 8 heures," which shows the British forces in rear of their actual positions. See Maps #2, 3, pp. 159, 160.

[67] French to Kitchener, 22 August, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/6. See maps 2, 3, pp. 159, 160.

[68] For accounts of the Battle of Charleroi, see Goutard, La Marne, pp. 111-34; AFGG, I(I), 471-98; Lanrezac, Plan de campagne, pp. 150-96; Spears, Liaison, pp. 124-95; cf. Joffre, Mémoires, I, 298. Lanrezac claims to have saved the Fifth Army from disaster by this manoeuvre in retreat. (Lanrezac, Plan de campagne, pp. 183-85.) Cf. Général Gallieni, Les carnets de Gallieni, published by his son, Gaetan Gallieni, with notes by P.-B. Gheusi (Paris: Albin Michel, 1932), entry of May 1, 1915, p. 164. Besson, former officer of Lanrezac's staff, presented the view to Gallieni that Lanrezac had avoided a new Sedan.

sternation, remained firmly anchored behind the Sambre during the entire battle and was not sent forward to take pressure off the beleagured French centre or to support the British advance. Two reserve divisions, moreover, whose fighting capacity Lanrezac almost totally discounted, were moved forward only belatedly on August 23 to form a liaison with the rear of British forces at Maubeuge.[69]

Despite the inactivity of his own left, Lanrezac repeatedly called on the British to attack to take the pressure off his centre. But, under the influence of Spears, who displayed a real talent for discerning the true mood at Fifth Army Headquarters, Sir John was becoming increasingly suspicious of Lanrezac's intentions. On the evening of August 22, Spears arrived at Le Cateau with the disconcerting news that the Xth Corps of the Fifth Army centre had been driven back. Spears, moreover, was firmly convinced that Lanrezac, who appeared "sombre and silent" at the sight of the wounded (including one of his Divisional Generals) and the spectacle of pitiful throngs of refugees in pell mell flight to the rear of his Army, had no intention of attacking. The widening gap of nine miles between the British right and the French left and intelligence reports on the danger to the British left by an advancing German corps further inspired Sir John to caution. Only the British cavalry had been lightly engaged at Binche during the day. But after consultation with Murray, whose grimness was fully apparent, French wisely decided to countermand the intended advance of the British Army on August 23.[70] Justifiably suspicious of the French Commander's intentions, and responding to Murray's counsel of caution and prudence, Sir John thus saved his army from an adventurous isolated action.

---

[69] See Spears, Liaison, pp. 147-48, 214-15; French, 1914, p. 59. Lanrezac's III Corps, in the centre of his Army, composed partially of Algerian troops, suffered severely and fell back in some disorder. (Alexandre, Avec Joffre, entry of August 23, 1914, pp. 129039; cf. Goutard, La Marne, pp. 122-25.)

Lanrezac, however, still dissimulated his real intentions. "At 11 p.m. we received messages from Lanrezac," wrote Wilson, "saying he was going to stand again from Yvoir to Thuin, & asking if we would assume the offensive." After consulting with Murray and Wilson, Sir John replied to Huguet "at midnight" "that he could not advance without knowing what was in his front, but that he would stand where he was, i.e., south of Binche-Mons-Corney," "until he got reports from his aeroplanes & would then decide his action."[71] Sir John, in view of his exposed position, was thus prepared to make every reasonable effort to comply with Lanrezac's request, thereby demonstrating a considerable fund of good will and solidarity toward the French despite his embroiled relations with Lanrezac.

Lanrezac was not quite so gallant. Vociferous in his complaints against the British to GQG on August 21,[72] Lanrezac blatantly distorted the actual situation on August 22 by reporting to GQG, apparently to justify the inactivity of his own left wing, that the British were indeed "one echelon to the rear."[73]

---

[70] Spears, Liaison, pp. 143-50. On the gap between French and British forces, see also Lanrezac, Plan de campagne, pp. 167-68. Lanrezac's alarmist state of mind is born out by his sombre report to French Headquarters. (V Army, Message telephoned to GQG, 10:30 p.m., 22 August, [1914], AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 876 and n. 1, p. 729.)

[71] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 22, 1914; Huguet to Commander, V Army, 23 August, [1914], 1:00 a.m., AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 1054; cf. CT #3255, Huguet to GQG, 23 August, 1914, 3:10 p.m., AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 1056; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 295.

[72] Alexandre, Avec Joffre, entry of Friday, August 21, 1914, p. 129; cf. Spears, Liaison, pp. 118-19.

Sir John's growing irritation with Lanrezac's failure to support his right became manifest in his late night demand on the 22nd that French reserve divisions be moved up to fill the gap between his Army and the XVIII Corps.[74] In effect, the French Cavalry Corps, which was supposed to have moved to the British left across the face of British deployment, had been forced under strong enemy pressure to fall back to the Sambre on the British right between the two armies.[75] In response to the British message, Lanrezac moved the two reserve divisions on his far left as far forward as Maubeuge the next day, establishing liaison with the rearguard of the British Army and filling the gap left by the departure of the French Cavalry Corps marching behind the Force to the left flank.[76]

On August 23, Sir John began to show even greater irritation at what he apparently thought was a French attempt to engage him in an isolated action. In reply to Lanrezac's query as to British intentions, Sir John observed pointedly in mid-afternoon that "I am prepared to fulfil the *role* allotted to me when the 5th Army advances to the attack." The positions reached in the meantime by the British on the line Conde-Mons-Erquelinnes, said Sir John, were "much in advance of the line held by the 5th Army" and "as far forward as circumstances will allow," especially as he was not prepared for offensive action until the next day. At the same time, Sir John complained that the French Cavalry Corps, which was to cover his left, had not arrived nor had Lanrezac engaged his XVIIIth Corps on the British right as promised.[77]

---

[73] Spears, *Liaison*, pp. 150-51; V^{e} Armée, Message telephoned [to French Headquarters], August 22, 1914, *AFGG*, I(I) A(I), no. 876 and n. 1, p. 729.

[74] Huguet to Commander, V Army, 23 August, 1914, 1:00 a.m., *AFGG*, I(I) A(I), no. 1054; French, *1914*, p. 58.

[75] Spears, *Liaison*, n. 1, pp. 147-48, p. 48; Wilson Diaries, V, *IWM*, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 22, 1914; *AFGG*, I(I), Map #32, "Situation de la V^{e} Armée et de l'Armée Britannique le 22 août 1914 à 5 heures"; CT Cavalry Corps to V^{e} Army 22 August, [1914], *AFGG*, I(I) A(I), no. 980; Vth Army Message telephoned to *GQG*, 10:30 p.m., 22 August, 1914, *AFGG*, I(I) A(I), no. 876 and n. 1, p. 729.

[76] Spears, *Liaison*, p. 169; see Lanrezac, *Plan de campagne*, pp. 167-68; also "Compte rendu" to *GQG* [by Vth Army], 23 August, [1914], *AFGG*, I(I) A(I), no. 1117 and n. 1, p. 882; CT #1899, Sordet (Cavalry Commander) to General-in-Chief, 23 August, [1914], *AFGG*, I(I) A(I), no. 1235.

At this moment of growing tension and bitterness, the march of events overtook British efforts to coordinate their offensive with the movements of the Fifth Army. On August 23, the British left wing west of Mons was attacked by elements of at least five German divisions of von Kluck's First Army.[78] Engaged all day "against vastly superior forces," British troops "tenaciously" held their ground, but were obliged to retreat to the Valenciennes-Maubeuge line because of the fall of Namur and news received at 11:00 p.m. that the Fifth Army was falling further back, south of Philippeville to the Maubeuge Rocroy line.[79]

A closer look at the decision-making process at British Headquarters just prior to that decision reveals one of the grave weakness[illegible] in the British Command. The previous day Sir John, inspired by Murray had adopted a cautious approach and had decided to stand on his lines until further aerial reconnaissance. But on the night of August 23, under the influence of the reckless Wilson, both Sir John and Murray had been persuaded to attack on the morrow.[80] That decision was apparently made without reference to either the superior German forces engaged during the day or to British aerial reconnaissance, which had identified two and possibly three German corps before the British Army.[81] For some strange reason, Wilson had come to the fantastic conclusion that the BEF had only one corps and a cavalry division or possibly two corps in front of it. The attack plan was quashed only by a "wire" from Joffre later in the evening, saying the British had two and a half corps and two cavalry corps in front of them and "news" from Lanrezac at 11:00 p.m. that the Fifth Army was "falling back" still further south of Philippeville. "Between 11^{pm} & 3^{am} we drafted orders and made arrangements for retirement to the line Maubeuge-Valenciennes," Wilson wrote. "It has been a day of sharp fighting & severe disappointment," Wilson concluded.[82] Indeed it had! Nor did the existence of conflicting tendencies at British Headquarters, between which Sir John vacillated so rapidly, augur well for the future of the campaign.

---

[77] Spears, *Liaison*, p. 162. Cf. French, *1914*, p. 59, who erroneously claims this message was sent the previous day. Cf. #3255, Huguet to *GQG*, 23 August, 1914, 3:10 p.m., *AFGG*, I(I) A(I), no. 1056, which indicates no decision had been made to advance at 11:00 a.m.

[78] See *HGW* (1914), I, 71-95; Huguet, *Britain and the War*, p. 57.

[79] Copy in Kitchener's hand of message from Sir John French, 24-8-14, Kitchener Papers, *PRO*, 30 57/49 WA/7; Arthur, *Kitchener*, III, 35-36; Wilson Diaries, V, *IWM*, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 23, 1914; *HGW* (1914), I, 93-94; cf. French, *1914*, p. 63.

---

[80] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 23, 1914; cf. French, 1914, pp. 61-63.

[81] English HQ to GQG, 23 August, [1914], 2:40 p.m., AFGG, I(I) A(I), no.1055; cf. Spears, Liaison, pp.148-49, 163. See French to Kitchener, 22 August,1914,PRO, 30 57/49 WA/6 and Berthelot,Diary,I,entry of August 22, 1914, p. 53 for the excellence of British aerial reconnaissance.

[82] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 23, 1914; Goutard, La Marne, p. 130; Copy in Kitchener's hand of message from Sir John French, 24-8-14, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/7; Arthur, Kitchener, III, 35-36; cf. French, 1914, p. 63. French had in fact been considering retreat much earlier in the evening and Lanrezac had been duly informed via Sordet by 8:00 p.m. (Sordet, Cavalry Corps, to V Army, 23 August, 1914, 8:00 p.m., AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 1236; cf. French, 1914, p. 63.)

Joffre's strategy had in fact suffered a resounding defeat. "The news received is bad on almost all the front," wrote Berthelot on August 23, which turned out to be a very bleak day at French Headquarters.[83] Bad news, in effect, had begun to come in much earlier with the forced retreat of the Second Army from Morhange on August 20.[84] Placed on the defensive due to German counterattacks, just as the action on the French left got underway,[85] the French Armies in Lorraine were thrust back to their initial starting place on the French frontier on August 23, at which point, however, they were able to hold. The Ardennes Battle, heralded as the decisive engagement, was also lost; even though they had fielded superior forces, the French Third and Fourth Armies were compelled to withdraw, largely because of bad tactics in a difficult terrain and poor leadership.

On the night of August 23, Lanrezac, his centre thrust back, his right flank endangered by the incursion across the Meuse of detachments of three corps of the German Third Army, and further exposed by the retreat of the French Fourth Army, and fearing a "new Sedan," ordered a general retreat to the Maubeuge-Philippeville-Givet line.[87] Word that his right and centre were falling even further back finally precipitated the British retreat from Mons. The retreat of Lanrezac and the British was the final blow. Joffre's strategy had failed all along the line, producing the so-called lost "Battle of the Frontiers."

---

[83] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of 23 August, 1914, p. 53; see also Alexandre, Avec Joffre, entry of 23 August, 1914, pp. 129-30.

[84] This reversal was partially dissimulated from the Government until August 22 (see CT #1571 and #1673, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, 21, 22 August, 1914, AFGG, I(II) A(I), nos. 103, 114 respectively) and government complaints led to the appointment of two liaison officers to the government (Penelon and Herbillon). (Joffre, Mémoires, I, 293-94.)

[85] CT #1701, Instruction particulière #18 for the I and II Armies, 22 August, [1914], AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 816.

[86] Alexandre, Avec Joffre, entry of 23 August, 1914, pp. 129-30; Berthelot, Diary, I, entries of August 22, 23, 1914, pp. 53-55; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 294-95.

[87] See Joffre, Mémoires, I, 298-99; Goutard, La Marne, pp. 130-31.

The failure of Joffre's strategy dealt a sledge-hammer blow to the military coalition. With the forced retreat from Mons, Sir John's optimism and confidence in the French Command simply evaporated. Having suffered a serious military reverse, Sir John, like Lord Gort twenty-six years later, began to look to his ports.[88] Referring specifically to Kitchener's instructions in case of retreat (to fall back on the line of communications to Amiens rather than withdraw to the Channel ports), French asked on August 24 "that immediate attention should be directed to defence of [Le] Havre."[89] At 6:00 p.m. he wired Lanrezac that if the British left were further threatened, he would abandon the task of covering the left of the Fifth Army, and withdraw on his line of communications to Amiens.[90]

The alacrity with which the British Government responded to Sir John's request by offering to defend Le Havre with 6,000 British troops, abandoning Boulogne as a base and establishing a new base at Cherbourg, would suggest that Sir John was not out of step with national policy.[91] "British commanders," notes Bond, "will reflect their country's view and will always place the safety of their troops above considerations of an alliance."[92]

---

[88] See Brian Bond, France and Belgium, 1939-1940 (London: Davis-Paynter, 1975). As early as May 19, 1940, six days after the Ardennes breakthrough, Gort began to consider the possibility of retreat to his bases. (Ibid., p. 112.) His evacuation was to prove the salvation of the BEF.

[89] Copy in Kitchener's hand of message from Sir John French, 24-8-14, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/7. Arthur, Kitchener, III, 35-36.

[90] Spears, Liaison, pp. 185-86; V Army to GQG, 24 August, 1914, 6:00 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(I), no. 321. Cf. Arthur, Kitchener, III, 35-36 who claims Kitchener's instructions were to fall back in liaison with the French Army.

British commitment to the campaign in France, after all, was quite different from that of the French. To the French it was a life and death struggle to which every resource must be committed. To the British it was not tantamount to survival, for between the European armies and the heart of empire lay the English Channel and the Royal Navy. As indicated in Kitchener's instructions to Sir John, British commitment to the campaign in France was strictly limited. The British Government, most of all, was unprepared to lose the BEF, the only immediately available military force in the Empire, in an adventurous campaign in France. In that regard, 1914 was very much like 1940.

The events of August 24 sealed Sir John's disenchantment with Lanrezac and the French Command. A new offer from Lanrezac (himself in retreat an echelon to the rear of the British) to attack if the British did likewise was treated as pure cant, an attempt to save face, and rejected out of hand.[93] The retreat of the British Army from Mons to the

---

[91] CT #440, Paul Cambon to Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, 25 August, 1914, 12:10 p.m., AE, Série "Guerre 1914-1918," vol. 534, p. 53. Cambon in London thought that acceptance of a British contingent for the defence of Le Havre would be interpreted as a sign of weakness, but the French Cabinet, after debating the matter, swallowed its pride and, in view of the military situation, gratefully accepted the British offer. (CT 836, T 848, Ministre des Affaires Etrangères to Ambassador, London, 25 August, 1914, AE, Série "Guerre 1914-1918," vol. 534, pp. 56, 68; CT 545, Cambon to Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, London, 26 August, 1914, AE, Série "Guerre 1914-1918," vol. 534, p. 67; CT 891, Ministre des Affaires Etrangères to Ambassador, London, 29 August, 1914, AE, Série "Guerre 1914-1918," vol. 534, p. 78.)

[92] Bond, France and Belgium, p. 179.

[93] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 24, 1914;

Maubeuge-Valenciennes line, moreover, executed on August 24 under pressure from von Kluck's First Army, was a difficult manoeuvre, accompanied by "heavy fighting all day until 4:30 p.m. & some moments of great anxiety."[94] As German fire abated in the evening, the British Force was finally allowed to retreat unmolested, but losses of 2,200, though considered light under the circumstances, were serious on the British left. Weary from marching, the Army enjoyed good morale but was "very irritated at being compelled to retreat without having fought."[95]

Word via Spears that the entire French left was in retreat finally shattered Sir John's confidence in the French Command.[96] "The French do not keep me sufficiently informed as to the general situation," he complained to Kitchener by letter on August 25, "and they evidently try to conceal reverses or compulsory retirements." "It is, of course, always difficult to work with an ally," he wrote, "and I am feeling this rather acutely."[97] By not reproducing the more vitriolic parts of this letter, Arthur, Kitchener's early biographer, gave the false impression that Sir John's loss of confidence in the French Command and consequent

---

CT "Note du Cateau," British Army to V Army, 24 August, 1914, AFGG, I(II) A(I), no. 167 and n. 1, p. 134. See Spears, Liaison, pp. 196-203 for a fuller account of this offer, made to give satisfaction to Spears' plea for Lanrezac's support of the British Army.

[94] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 24, 1914. For a full account, see HGW (1914), I, 96-117. Cf. Huguet, Britain and the War, pp. 58-59.

[95] Huguet [to GQG], 24 August, 1914, 11:30 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(I), no. 168; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 24, 1914; see HGW (1914),I, 96-117; Letter of French to Kitchener, 25 August, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/8.

[96] French, 1914, p. 64.

[97] Letter of French to Kitchener, 25 August, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/9.

concern for the ultimate safety of his force came later, after the Le Cateau defeat.[98]

Sir John's grievance against Lanrezac was largely justified. Lanrezac's failure to advance into Belgium, he complained, resulted in loss of the initiative to the enemy. "But this is not the worst aspect of what has happened," he continued.

> Whilst I took a forward position . . ., the French 5th Army were actually retiring, and doing so without giving me any warning so that on Sunday night (23) and Monday morning (24) I found myself almost in the air with three German Corps and two Cavalry Divisions advancing on my positions.
>
> The promised support on my left flank of the three French Cavalry Divisions under Sordet was also lacking.[99]

But not only had Lanrezac treated him unfairly; the French Command, in Sir John's view, had also shown a considerable lack of energy. British retreat to the Le Cateau-Cambrai line on the 25th, he wrote, was necessitated by the "apparent hesitation on the part of the French Commander to take the offensive and by the *fear of further retirement on* his part."[100] In reply to a message from Kitchener, urging Sir John to encourage Joffre to take a more offensive stance, Sir John reported emphatically that he had "consistently tried" through Huguet "to bring home to the French Commander-in-Chief the necessity of a vigourous offensive," but pointed out the difficulty of trying "to induce these French Generals to consider any modification of the views they have formed."[101] That observation was quite appropriate under the circumstances, and contrasts sharply with the accepted historical interpretation of the foolhardy penchant of the French Command for the offensive.[102] Sir John therefore took a dim view as to the future of the campaign. "As the French still seem to be so supine," he wrote, "I am continuing my retirement tomorrow from the line LE-CATEAU - CAMBRAI toward PERONNE."[103] That line of retreat was consistent with Sir John's intention, as communicated to Lanrezac on the 24th, to retire upon his line of communication to Amiens in the event of a serious threat to his left, and to abandon responsibility for the defence of Lanrezac's left flank.[104] To Kitchener, he breathed a sigh of relief that his line of communication to Amiens was safe. "I do not wish to risk a battle with the Germans against greatly superior forces," he wrote glumly on August 25.[105]

---

[98] See Arthur, *Kitchener*, III, 37-38.

[99] Letter of French to Kitchener, 25 August, 1914, Kitchener Papers, *PRO*, 30/57/49 WA/8.

[100] T F 30, French to Kitchener, 25-8-14, Kitchener Papers, *PRO*, WO 159/13. (Italics are French's.)

[101] Letter of French to Kitchener, 25 August, 1914, Kitchener Pa-

The future of continued military cooperation had indeed fallen into jeopardy. From unbounded confidence in the French Command and optimism on the prospect of an advance, Sir John's sentiment had swung full

---

pers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/8. No evidence has been located in French sources of Huguet's urging Joffre toward a more offensive stance. See, however, Clive Diaries, II/I, University of London, King's College, Centre for Military Archives (hereinafter referred to as KCMA), entry of August 25, 1914, which indicates French pressed Clive, his liaison officer at French Headquarters, to inquire about Joffre's intentions.

[102] T F 30, French to Kitchener, 25-8-14, Kitchener Papers, PRO, WO 159/13.

[103] Letter, French to Kitchener, 25 August, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/8.

[104] Spears, Liaison, pp. 185-86; CT #243/3, V Army to GQG, 24 August, 1914, 6:00 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(I), no. 231; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 299; cf. French, 1914, p. 74, who claims his purpose was to find shelter behind the Oise or the Somme.

[105] French to Kitchener, 25 August, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/8.

circle to the repeated cautions contained in his instructions. Annoyed at the apparent unaggressiveness of the French Command, of which Lanrezac was the most immediate expression, the British Commander entertained serious doubts about the willingness of the French Command to engage fully. His chief concern thereafter, which would impose real dangers for the military alliance, was to husband his forces and to keep open his line of retreat.

The legacy of delayed British arrival, personality conflict between Sir John and Lanrezac, the latter's personal strategic conceptions and attempt to escape direction from the French Command, and his cavalier treatment of the British, whom he urged to advance when he himself in fact planned a retreat, were all contributing factors to the bad state of Allied military relations after the retreat from Mons. But even more crucial was the failure of the French strategic plan which compelled Anglo-French retreat and destroyed Sir John's confidence in the French Command and the future of the campaign. As Brian Bond wrote of the 1940 campaign: "Sharply differing national preoccupations and mutual suspicions, which had never been successfully subordinated to the needs of the alliance, quickly surfaced when things began to go wrong,"[106] making further cooperation even more difficult. That the initial success of German over French strategy struck so close to the "centre of gravity" of the military alliance would have pleased the long-departed Clausewitz, that "madhi of mass," whose dictums hung so heavily over the great battles of the First World War.

---

[106] Bond, France and Belgium, p. 96.

CHAPTER V

THE SECOND FAILURE OF FRENCH STRATEGIC PLANNING AND THE NEAR COLLAPSE OF ALLIED MILITARY COOPERATION

THE AISNE, AUGUST 25 - 30, 1914

The failure of the "Battle of the Frontiers" left the French Command temporarily without a strategic plan. Acknowledging that "the general offensive in Belgium" had been "definitively" wiped out, Joffre was able to give only the general principles of his future conduct in a less than cheery but now famous report to the Government on August 24. "We are therefore compelled to resort to the defensive," he wrote, "using our fortresses and the great topographical obstacles to enable us to yield as little ground as possible." "Our object must be to last out as long as possible, trying to wear out the enemy," he continued, "and to resume the offensive when the time comes."[1]

In buying time Joffre and his Staff hoped that the Russian offensive in East Prussia, about which they were receiving favourable reports, would divert German troops to the east and thus reduce pressure on the western front.[2] These hopes were not in vain. On August 20, the Russians had inflicted a setback at Gumbinnen on von Prittwitz's Eighth Army, and the latter, learning of the approach of another Russian Army southwest of the Masurian Lakes, lost his head and began to pull his forces back behind the Vistula. Moltke then ordered the two German corps before Namur to East Prussia on August 25. That diversion served no immediate military purpose, for the situation was restored in East Prussia before their arrival by the stunning German victory over the Russians near Tannenberg on August 26-30.[3] But the speed of Russian mobilization and early Russian successes, in diverting large German forces eastward, would contribute significantly, at a critical moment, to the turning of the tide on the western front.

---

[1] #1890, General-in-Chief to Minister of War, 24 August, [1914], 9:35 a.m., *AFGG*, I(II) A(I), no. 149; Spears, *Liaison*, p. 192; Alexandre, *Avec Joffre*, entries of August 23, 24, pp. 129-30; Berthelot, *Diary*, I, entries of August 23, 24, 1914, pp. 53-57. Berthelot appears to have played a major role in the development of this new concept. (*Ibid.*)

[2] Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 292-93, 306-07, 345; Berthelot, *Diary*, I, entry of August 24, 1914, p. 55; Alexandre, *Avec Joffre*, entry of 24 August, 1914, p. 130; Gamelin, *Manoeuvre*, p. 82.

Faced with the grave necessity of restoring the situation on their front,[4] the French Command gradually evolved a new strategic plan over the next few days. That plan owed its origin as much to considerations of Allied command as strategy in the field. Indeed, the idea of creating a new army on the French left to fall on the German flank had been advocated by the Third Bureau as early as August 15. But on August 23, before that idea had been accepted, Joffre, apparently on his own initiative and without reference to his Staff, secretly obtained permission from the Minister of War to have two reserve divisions of the Paris mobile guard moved forward to cover the British left flank.[5]

"The question which preoccupied me the most on our left was the enveloping movement of the Germans, which appeared to accentuate," Joffre later wrote in his Mémoires.[6] "But it was the English alone who could meet this threat," he added, "that is to say, precisely the army to which I had not the right to give orders."[7] Uneasy from the very beginning at having a foreign army, not under his control, in a vital sector of the front, Joffre took steps to obviate the uncertainty of that situation. "It seemed to me particularly essential to extend the English left by French troops to which I could give orders," he wrote,[8] explaining his real motive for sending two reserve divisions from Paris to Arras on the night of August 23 with the ostensible "mission of covering the English left against any attempt at envelopment."[9] By encasing British forces whose fighting capacity Joffre may have already begun to doubt[10] with French troops under his direct command, he would more effectively bind the British to French strategic control and at the same time bolster the strength of his endangered left wing.

---

[3] See Cruttwell, The Great War, pp. 40-48.

[4] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 24, 1914, p. 55.

[5] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 301; CT #1878, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, 23 August, 1914, AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 1040. This document requesting the movement offered no reason for the request but indicated that "Major Dumont, who returns tonight [to] Paris, will provide a full explanation on the subject." (Ibid.)

The same day, indicative of his concern for the theatre, he also decided to pull back his Alsatian Army and to divert forces from it to "reinforce the extreme left." His plan had not yet ripened, however, for their ultimate destination was not yet specified.[11]

---

[6] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 301.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Before the Briey Commission, Joffre blamed the failure of his initial offensive essentially on the inadequacy of his commanders and the weakness of his Allies. "Disparate elements of unequal value (the English Army and the Belgian Army," he said, had been faced on the left with the "best units of the German Army." (Testimony of Joffre, July 4, 1919, Commission d'enquête, p. 146; see also p. 170.) Cf. Joffre, La préparation de la guerre, p. 40. In his Mémoires, Joffre more correctly blames the inadequacy of the original French plan.

During the next two days these tentative arrangements developed into a full-blown manoeuvre aimed at launching a decisive counter-stroke against the Germans on the Aisne. On August 24, it was decided to transfer by rail every available unit from the armies on the right, placed on the defensive below Verdun, to the extreme left of the French line.[12] On August 25, Joffre further decided in favour of Gamelin's proposal that an army be assembled on the British left to take the enveloping German right wing in its outer flank, rejecting as too risky Berthelot's suggestion that the new army be concentrated behind the left wing of the Fifth Army to take the German right wing in the inner flank.[13] Under the new plan, the French left, pivoting on Verdun, would delay the advance of the German armies by rearguard actions, mainly of the artillery, while the new Sixth Army, to consist of three divisions from Alsace, two from Lorraine, and two from Paris, would concentrate about Amiens on the German right flank. (That army, incidentally, would not only further enclose the British but would block retreat along their line of communications.) Once the Sixth Army had concentrated, the entire Allied left wing would resume the offensive on the Aisne.[14]

---

[11] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 23, 1914, p. 54. This decision appears to have been made independently of Berthelot (Ibid.), suggesting that Joffre had already begun to accept Third Bureau advice without reference to his senior Staff advisors.

[12] Berthelot, Diary, I, entries of August 24, 25, 1914, pp. 55, 60-61; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 311-13.

[13] Desmazes, Joffre, pp. 95-96; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 310-11.

[14] #2349, General Instruction no. 2, Commander-in-Chief to Commanders of Armies, AFGG, I(II) A(I), no. 395; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 25, 1914, pp. 60-61; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 311-13. Joffre decided to defer action on the Government's request of the same date that three corps be assembled to defend Paris. (Ibid., pp. 313-14.)

A brilliant manoeuvre, forerunner of the successful Marne manoeuvre and taking full advantage of the available railway lines, the Aisne manoeuvre was nevertheless doomed to failure from its inception, and for most of the same reasons that the previous manoeuvre of the Allied left wing had failed. For the plan to succeed, it was essential that the advance of the German Army from Maubeuge to the Aisne be delayed by rearguard actions of the French Fifth Army and the British Army at least until September 2 to allow for the concentration of the Sixth Army about Amiens.[15] But French military intelligence was aware of only about one-half of the forces Kluck had in front of the BEF.[16] Not until August 26 did the French learn via British intelligence that the regular German corps in Belgium were followed by reserve corps of the same number.[17] The delaying mission assigned the British Expeditionary Force was thus out of all proportion to the means at its disposal, just as the British mission on the Allied far left in the initial plan had been far beyond British capabilities.

Thrust back with serious losses at Le Cateau on August 26, the British were unable to carry out the mission assigned to them. Although the French Command would blame the British for the failure of the manoeuvre, the basic fault lay with the French themselves, who, on the basis of defective intelligence, had failed to mount the new manoeuvre far enough back to allow for the crushing advance of the German Armies. The negative impact on Allied military cooperation of this second failure of French strategy would be even greater than the first time around. Whereas the failure of Joffre's strategy on the frontiers had led to a partial breakdown in Allied military relations, this second failure and ensuing events would completely destroy Sir John's confidence in the French Command and the future of the campaign, and in consequence bring Allied relations and cooperation in the field to a state of virtual collapse. The German plan of striking at the Allied flank where the two Armies joined also struck at the heart of the military alliance and would come within an ace of success.

---

[15] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of 25 August, 1914, p. 61; "Map of situation established at Grand Quartier Général, 25 August, 1914, at 6:00 a.m.," AFGG, I(II), Maps I, #3; cf. Joffre, Mémoires, II, 311.

[16] "Map of situation established at Grand Quartier Général, 25 August, 1914, at 6:00 a.m.," AFGG, I(II), Maps I, #3.

[17] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of 26 August, 1914, p. 63. See also Huguet, Britain and the War, p. 62.

The French Command, in the meantime, had taken measures to increase the fighting capacity of their armies. They first investigated why their Armies had been thrown back in the Ardennes even when numerically superior. Concluding that the failure of certain corps and divisions was mainly the fault of their commanders, the High Command began a merciless purge of top generals.[18] At the same time, tactical instructions were issued to the troops to remedy the serious lack of coordination between infantry and artillery which had resulted directly from uncritical application of prewar offensive doctrine.[19] The War Minister's suggestion of revolutionary tribunals for incompetent generals, however, was rejected.[20] To maintain the morale of the troops, a source of concern in some units, Joffre nonetheless gave approval to a measure reminiscent of the French revolutionary past. "Deserters, if there be any," said a terse directive issued on September 2, "will be pursued and shot."[21]

---

[18] Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 301-02. For location of units, see *AFGG*, I(I), Maps #30; Alexandre, *Avec Joffre*, entries of August 23, 24, 1914, pp. 129-30; Joffre, *La préparation de la guerre*, p. 41; Berthelot, *Diary*, I, entry of August 24, 1914, p. 57 and memorandum to all Army Commanders, 31 August, 1914, pp. A 39-40.

[19] Berthelot, *Diary*, I, entries of August 23, 24, 1914, pp. 53-54, 57-58, and "Memorandum to Army Commanders relative to the use of artillery," 27 August, 1914, *Ibid.*, Annex 37, pp. A 36-37. See also Gamelin, *Manoeuvre*, pp. 68-69, 78; Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 303-04; #2083, "Note pour toutes les Armées," 24 August, 1914, *AFGG*, I(II) A(I), no. 158.

To implement Joffre's new plan would be a very difficult task, given the situation on the Allied left wing. As Joffre was aware, relations between Sir John and Lanrezac had seriously deteriorated. Sir John's grievances against Lanrezac, whom he reproached bitterly for "not having sustained" him and "not acting as a gentleman," the ultimate offense in British eyes, had been duly relayed to *GQG* by Huguet and Alexandre, Joffre's liaison officer to the Fifth Army.[22] Joffre, moreover, had been fully informed by Lanrezac on August 24 of Sir John's threat to fall back on his line of communications to Amiens in the event of further pressure on his outer flank, thereby giving up his mission of protecting the French left wing.[23]

Lanrezac, moreover, continued to "shout his grievances" against the British, some of which were certainly legitimate, "to all willing to listen." Although his Army was still to the rear of the British on August 25, he was greatly exercised by the danger to his flank which would arise with the threatened British retreat. He also complained on August 26 of the British First Corps' encroachment into his line of march.[24] "The atmosphere is poisoned," wrote Alexandre in his diary on August 25, "and it is necessary that General Joffre resolve the difficulty." Already this powerful liaison officer of the French Command had come to the conclusion that the "exuberant" Lanrezac was "not the man" for handling the British.[25]

---

[20] Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 302-03.

[21] General Order No. 11, 2 September, 1914, Berthelot, *Diary*, I, A, p. 47; see Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 309.

[22] Quotation is from Alexandre, *Avec Joffre*, entry of August 23, 1914, p. 131; Huguet to *GQG*, 24 August, 1914, 11:30 p.m., *AFGG*, I(II) A(I), no. 168; see also Huguet to Commander-in-Chief, 24 August, 1914, *AFGG*, I(II) A(I), no. 169 and n. 1, p. 135, which outlines French's grievance against Lanrezac. (Absence at French Headquarters of the original of this document, of which only a draft was found in the files of the Military Mission, casts some doubt on its having been sent. *Ibid.*) A fairly good statement of French's grievances, including the inactivity of the Fifth Army, was sent to French Headquarters on the morning of the August 26 conference. (Huguet to *GQG*, 26 August, 1914, 6 a.m., quoted in Spears, *Liaison*, p. 229, n. 1; *cf.* Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 316.)

[23] See Spears, *Liaison*, pp. 185-86; CT #243/3, V Army to *GQG*, 24 August, 1914, 6:00 p.m., *AFGG*, I(II) A(I), no. 231; Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 299; cf. French, *1914*, p. 74.

To get Sir John's vital commitment to the plan and to resolve the problems between the two commanders, Joffre arranged an interview with Sir John on August 26 at his new Headquarters at St. Quentin, to which Lanrezac was also invited.[26] That meeting also symbolized the exercise of closer control over the theatre. Indeed, during the Battle of Mons and the Battle of Charleroi, Joffre had played a very limited role in overall coordination. So far as the British were concerned, he had merely transmitted intelligence information, and when retreat had become necessary, he had simply suggested the Le Cateau-Cambrai line (also on the way to Amiens) as the direction of British retreat, in order to extend the Anglo-French left somewhat, while at the same time requesting a slow British withdrawal.[27] To all these requests Sir John had readily agreed.[28] Similar directives had also been sent to Lanrezac, emphatically punctuated with the injunction to remain in liaison with the British.[29] But overall direction of the manoeuvre from GQG had been slight. Now that a new plan had been devised, Joffre took a firmer hand in its execution, thereby assuming a more authoritarian personal style of command. The failure of local initiative in effect resulted in its suppression. Thereafter Joffre would deal more directly with Sir John.

---

[24] Alexandre, Avec Joffre, entry of August 24, 1914, p. 130; see Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 26, 1914, pp. 60-61.

[25] Alexandre, Avec Joffre, entry of August 25, 1914, p. 131.

[26] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 311-12, 316; see Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 25, 1914, p. 61.

[27] CT 2005, GQG to Armée "W", 24 August, [1914], 9:35 a.m.,

Joffre arrived at St. Quentin on August 26 in the middle of a severe crisis. The Battle of Le Cateau, which was going very badly for the British, spelled the defeat of the Aisne manoeuvre even while it was being presented. But Joffre's visit temporarily restored Sir John's confidence in the French Command and as a result led him to promise to remain in the line as long as possible and fall back only in conjunction with the French Armies on either side of him. That was a significant achievement for the French.

The origins of the British engagement at Le Cateau are worth recounting, as the battle entailed a significant departure from Sir John's stated intention of retreating on his line of communication toward Péronne. Its origins, in fact, demonstrated rather starkly the basic weakness within the British Command of divided counsel. Late in the night of August 25, the Second Corps, continuing its retreat from Mons, arrived on the partially dug-in line from Cambrai to Le Cateau. With dubious

---

AFGG, I(II) A(I), no. 150.

[28] CT 186, Mission H[uguet] to GQG, 24 August, 1914, 3:00 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(I), no. 165.

[29] See, for example, CT 243/3, V Army to GQG, 24 August, 1914, 6:00 a.m., CT 2096, Commander-in-Chief to V Army, 24 August, 1914, AFGG, I(II) A(I), nos. 231, 161; CT 2004, GQG to V Army, 24 August, 1914, 9:35 a.m., AFGG, I(I) A(I), no. 1263.

logic, Smith-Dorrien, the Corps Commander, cited the extreme fatigue of his men as a reason for the Corps, now strengthened by the arrival of the British 4th Division on his left, to stand and fight rather than to continue its retreat at dawn in the direction of Péronne, as Sir John had ordered. Sir John vacillated and, although he encouraged Smith-Dorrien's further retirement, made one of the most serious blunders of his command by giving him full liberty to decide his course of action.[30] Then, much against the intent of his Chief, Wilson encouraged Smith-Dorrien to make a decided stand.[31] Murray, unfortunately, was not available to counter Wilson's influence, as his health had begun to break down under the strain of bad news from the First Corps the previous evening, and he was not awakened in the night.[32] When presented with Smith-Dorrien's request at 7:00 a.m., he "promptly got a fainting fit," according to Wilson, and went back to bed.[33]

The British action at Le Cateau on August 26 resulted in a serious defeat. In a heroic but foolhardy stand, three British infantry divisions and a single cavalry division stood all day on the Cambrai-Le Cateau line against vastly superior forces--six infantry divisions and three cavalry divisions of von Kluck's First Army. The French gave good

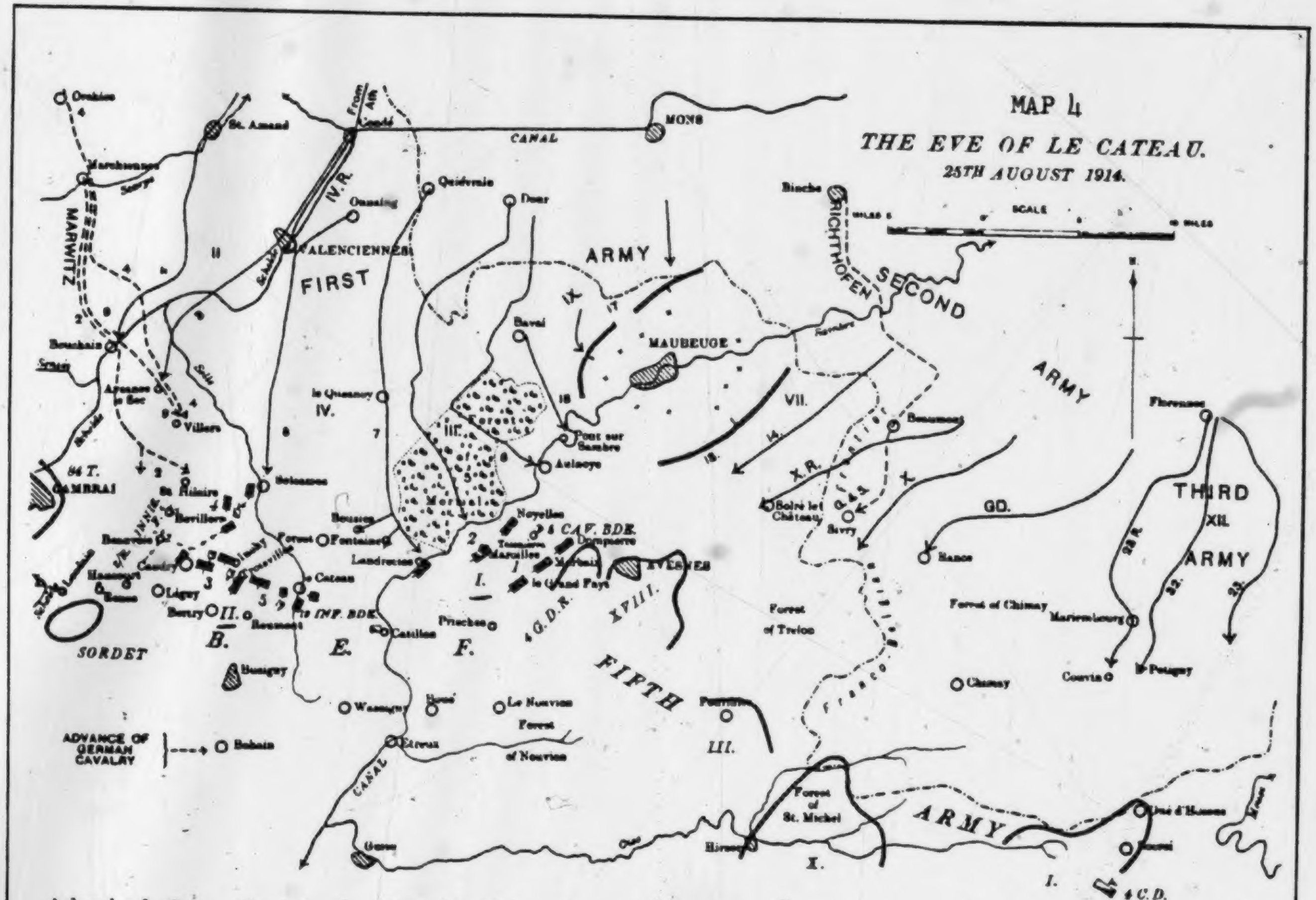
---

[30] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entries of August 25, 26, 1914; HGW (1914), I, 139-43; Letter, French to Kitchener, 27 August, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/11; cf. French, 1914, pp. 76-80 who denies any assent to Smith-Dorrien's request for permission to stand. See Huguet, Britain and the War, pp. 62-64. French was apparently unaware of the full extent of German forces on his front. (Spears, Liaison, p. 229, n.1.)

[31] Callwell, Wilson, I, 168-69. But see HGW (1914), I, 142.

[32] Spears, Liaison, pp. 233, 222-23; cf. Callwell, Wilson, I, 169.

[33] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 26, 1914; cf. Callwell, Wilson, I, 169.



MAP 4
THE EVE OF LE CATEAU.
25TH AUGUST 1914.
SCALE
MILES
N.
Orchies
St. Amand
Marchiennes
MARWITZ
Bouchain
Sensée
Arleux
Villers
84 T.
CAMBRAI
St. Hilaire
Bevillers
Beauvois
Caudry
Ligny
Bertry
II.
Reumont
B.
SORDET
Busigny
Le Cateau
19 INF. BDE.
Forest
Fontaine
Solesmes
Selle
Escaut
IV.R.
From Ath
Condé
CANAL
MONS
VALENCIENNES
Onnaing
Quiévrain
Dour
FIRST
ARMY
le Quesnoy
IV.
III.
Forest of Mormal
Bavai
IX
MAUBEUGE
Pont sur Sambre
Aulnoye
Sambre
Landrecies
Noyelles
4 CAV. BDE.
Dompierre
Maroilles
Marbaix
le Grand Fayt
I.
4 G.D.R.
Prisches
Catillon
E.
F.
XVIII.
AVESNES
FIFTH
Forest of Trelon
Wassigny
Le Nouvion
Forest of Nouvion
Etreux
CANAL
Guise
Oise
Hirson
Forest of St. Michel
X.
LII.
ADVANCE OF GERMAN CAVALRY
Bohain
Binche
RICHTHOFEN
SECOND
VII.
X.R.
X
Boire le Château
Sivry
Beaumont
ARMY
GD.
Rance
Forest of Chimay
Chimay
Mariembourg
Couvin
Pesches
Florennes
THIRD
XII.
ARMY
23
23 R.
ARMY
Franco Belgian
I.
4 C.D.
Ordnance Survey, 1924.

Adapted from Sketch 6, HGW (1914), I, between pp. 120-21.

support on the left. By the timely action of D'Amade's three divisions (two reserve and one territorial), the German Second Corps, whose mission was to take the British Force in the left flank, was stalled, while Sordet's cavalry came up on the British left at an opportune moment to cover the British withdrawal. But no support was forthcoming from the British right, as Haig's First Corps, separated from the Second Corps by the Mormal Forest, had itself been dispersed over 30 kilometres and into the billets of the Fifth Army by enemy fire the day previous. Fortunately for the British, the enemy did not fully discover the gap between the two Corps. Nor did Lanrezac come to British aid. His army, deployed in a vast concave crescent to the rear of the British right, was deemed too far distant for effective support and merely conformed its movement to the retreat of the British First Corps. That attitude was less than obliging.

By late afternoon, Smith-Dorrien's left was partially outflanked and compelled to retreat. The real problem, however, was that communications had broken down so that units of the 3rd and 4th Divisions on his centre and right were not informed of the withdrawal. Pinned to the ground, these two divisions were seriously battered and fell back in considerable disorder. Wilson's observation on their condition the next day was that they "about exist." British losses of 8,000 men and 38 guns (mainly in these two divisions) were severe, given the limited size of the Force,[34]--but not totally debilitating, as the British Command was soon wont to believe.

---

[34] For a laudatory account of British performance at Le Cateau, see HGW (1914), I, 139-211. For statistics on losses, see Ibid., p. 191, n. 1. See also Huguet, Britain and the War, pp. 62-65; Spears, Liaison, pp. 224-25. "Movement of British Army on August 26, 1914, and location of the V Army at nightfall," AFGG, I(II), Maps I, #7; Lanrezac, Plan de campagne, pp. 201, 211-14; Letter, French to Kitchener, 27 August, 1914, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/11; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, en-

Bad news about the engagement had just begun to arrive at St. Quentin as Joffre arrived to speak with the British generals at 11:00 a.m. on the morning of August 26. The massive Berthelot, who accompanied Joffre at this emotion-charged conference, which included Sir John, Murray, Huguet, Joffre, D'Amade and Lanrezac, described the crisis as follows:

> We find the Staff in a complete panic; it is a critical moment! Smith-Dorrien is engaged at Le Cateau, and it appears that it is not going well at all. French waves his arms to the heavens and exclaims: "It's a debacle, it's a debacle!" Joffre slowly interjects in his calm voice, "But, my dear Marshal [Monsieur le Maréchal], even if it were true, it would not be up to you to say so!" That suffices to bring a little calm.

The generals proceeded to an examination of the situation. Then Lanrezac arrived, "thundering, complaining of everything and everyone, especially the encroachment of the English on his line of march."[35]

---

tries of August 26, 27, 1914. Cf. Generaloberst Alexander von Kluck, *The March on Paris and the Battle of the Marne* (London: Edward Arnold, 1920), pp. 60-68.

[35] Berthelot, *Diary*, I, entry of 26 August, 1914, pp. 61-62. Numerous accounts of this important meeting are extant. The most extensive account is that in Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 316-19. See also Lanrezac, *Plan de campagne*, pp. 208-11. Huguet, in his brief account, *Britain and the War*, pp. 65-68, challenges some of Lanrezac's recollections. Spears, not present, but working from archival material and eyewitness accounts, disputes Huguet's version and confirms the accuracy of Lanrezac's account. (Spears, *Liaison*, Appendix XXVI, p. 528.)

Spears' own account (*Liaison*, pp. 228-33) differs in some details from Berthelot's unpublished account cited above, and Spears' assertion that Wilson was present and not Murray is not credible, as Wilson makes no mention of the meeting in his diary. (See Wilson Diaries, V, *IWM*, DS/Misc/80, entries of August 26, 27, 1914.)

Sir John French's memoir account erroneously places the interview on both the 26th and 27th (apparently on the basis of a telegram he sent to Kitchener on the latter date) and obscures the fact that the French plan was fully explained to him on the 26th. (French, *1914*, pp. 81-86. Cf. Arthur, *Kitchener*, III, 38-39; copy of telegram, French to Kitchener, 27 August, 1914, Kitchener Private Office Papers, *PRO*, WO 159/13.)

Although the several accounts differ on numerous details, they

To appease Lanrezac and compensate for British spill-over into his line of retreat, Joffre assigned him La Fère, somewhat to the east of the original St. Quentin, as the new position of his left wing.[36]

Sir John's recrimination against Lanrezac, at least as bitter as those of Lanrezac against him, then followed. Recounting the events of August 23 and 24, Sir John legitimately complained about the Fifth Army's sudden retreat from Charleroi and the consequent isolation of his forces in face of superior numbers.[37] His bitter complaints, however, found little quarter among the French. Lanrezac made no attempt to explain his behavior,[38] and Joffre provided only cold comfort with the observation that all the Allied armies had been "subjected to the vigourous effort of the enemy" and that the British ought not to consider themselves unique in that regard.[39]

Thus, no real progress was made in salving the strained and acrimonious relationship between Lanrezac and Sir John at this, their second and last meeting. Nor were any specific plans agreed upon for the coordination of their retreats beyond the one adjustment in their lines of

---

are in substantial agreement on the major issues, which alone concern us here.

[36] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 316-17; Lanrezac, Plan de campagne, pp. 201-04, 208-09, places this portion of the conversation before the arrival of French, but Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 26, 1914, p. 62, an on-the-spot account, claims Lanrezac arrived after the conference had begun. Cf. Spears, Liaison, pp. 228, 231.

[37] French, 1914, p. 82; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 317; Huguet, Britain and the War, p. 66; cf. Lanrezac, Plan de campagne, p. 209.

[38] French, 1914, pp. 82-83; cf. Spears, Liaison, p. 229.

[39] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 317; cf. Lanrezac, Plan de campagne, p. 209, who claims Joffre made no reply.

march, which were now to be spelled out by GQG.[40] The chief benefit of this encounter, so far as relations between the two commanders were concerned, was to alert Joffre and Berthelot to the gravity of the situation. Both went away with an awakened sense of the fragility of the Allied left and grave doubts as to whether the British Army, in light of preliminary bad news from Le Cateau and the state of mind of its Commander, would be able to stall the Germans long enough for the success of the Aisne manoeuvre.[41] Both acquired a fuller appreciation of the profound misunderstanding between the two field commanders, the result, in Joffre's words, of "two temperaments, two mentalities, so essentially different," unable to agree under the pressure of combat.[42] "There is an obvious and visible misunderstanding between the two neighbours that cannot continue thus for long without damage to the future course of events," wrote Berthelot.[43] The conference, though not resolving the conflict, was thus useful in pointing to the dire need for a later solution.

Joffre was much more successful in temporarily restoring Sir John's confidence in the French Command and in gaining his adhesion to the new plan. Their discussion of the new manoeuvre, nevertheless, got off to an inauspicious start. Pointing to the advantages of Sir John's cooperation with the manoeuvre of the French Armies, and asking in particular that he strive to observe operational zones more carefully,[44] Joffre was amazed to learn that his general instruction on the new manoeuvre had been received at British Headquarters, apparently by Murray, but had not been brought to the attention of the British Chief.[45] Joffre then proceeded (apparently over dinner) to outline in detail his new plan and the role he wished the British to play in it,[46] while Lanrezac, declining Sir John's hospitality, hastened back to his command. Huguet, denied the conviviality of the generals *à table*, was charged with the mundane task of translating Joffre's general instruction.[47]

---

[40] See French, 1914, p. 82; Lanrezac, Plan de campagne, pp. 210-11; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 26, 1914, p. 62; CT #2477, Commander-in-Chief to Huguet, 27 August, 1914, 5:30 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(I), no. 814; cf. Spears, Liaison, pp. 224, 228, 231.

[41] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 26, 1914, p. 62; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 319; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 120.

[42] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 319; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 120; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 26, 1914, p. 62.

[43] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 26, 1914, p. 62.

Giving orders during the interview for support of Sir John's left wing, Joffre again made a good impression on the British Chief. Sir John was especially pleased to learn that Joffre too was dissatisfied with Lanrezac's conduct.[48] Blaming the rough and wooded terrain of the Ardennes country for the failure of the initial manoeuvre, Joffre restored Sir John's confidence in the French Army by arguing that the new manoeuvre in open country would give their superior field artillery full scope for action and affirming that French regular troops were in good spirits and well led.[49] The results were tonic. Without making a specific pledge, Sir John expressed the hope that he would be able to stay in the line despite his heavy losses and agreed to retreat as "slowly and deliberately as possible" in conjunction with French forces on either side of him until in a position "to take the offensive."[50] Reporting the meeting to Kitchener the next day, French, while reiterating his old grievances against both Lanrezac and Joffre, nonetheless expressed his renewed confidence in the French Command. "In my frank opinion," he said, "there is nothing seriously wrong with our allies and Gen[era]l Joffre's new plan promises much better results." "Pursuing the above plan," he wrote, even after receiving news of the Le Cateau defeat, "I am continuing my retreat . . . through ST. QUENTIN-HANDSOYON,"[51] signifying his full acceptance of the plan and abandonment of his earlier concept of retreat to Amiens. The conference thus momentarily achieved its initial intent of binding Sir John to the French plan, despite early information on the reverses at Le Cateau, which might have made British acceptance of the plan rather doubtful.

---

[44] Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 318. The first definite instruction on the line of march of each army was that given in the order outlining the Aisne manoeuvre. (#2349, Instruction générale no. 2, Commander-in-Chief to Commanders of Armies, 25 August, 1914, *AFGG*, I(II) A(I), no. 395.)

[45] Lanrezac, *Plan de campagne*, pp. 209-10; Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 318; cf. Spears, *Liaison*, pp. 229-30; Huguet, *Britain and the War*, pp. 66-67.

[46] Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 318; see T., French to Kitchener, 27 August, 1914, Kitchener Private Office Papers, *PRO*, WO 159/13. Spears wrongly asserts that Joffre's plan was not discussed fully. (Cf. Spears, *Liaison*, pp. 230-31.)

[47] Both Lanrezac and Huguet (*Britain and the War*, pp. 66-67) claim the conference came to an end at that point, with Lanrezac declining French's invitation to dine, on the allegation that he had to get back to his post (Lanrezac, *Plan de campagne*, p. 210) and Huguet being charged with the translation of Joffre's general instruction (Huguet, *Britain and the War*, pp. 66-67). The real work of the conference, however, appears to have been accomplished between Joffre and Sir John over the dinner table and after, which was often the case in Allied military meetings. See French, *1914*, p. 83, who claims that Joffre lingered with him "some considerable time."

[48] French, *1914*, p. 83; see Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 318, for orders given during the interview.

---

[49] T., French to Kitchener, 27 August, 1914, Kitchener Private Office Papers, *PRO*, WO 159/13. Cf. French, *1914*, p. 186, who puts this part of the interview on the next day but reflects its sympathetic character. Cf. Arthur, *Kitchener*, III, 38-39. The most essential parts of the above communication, which showed Sir John's full acceptance of the new plan, were deleted in Arthur's reproduction.

[50] French, *1914*, pp. 83, 86; Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 318.

[51] T., French to Kitchener, 27 August, 1914, Kitchener Private Office Papers, *PRO*, WO 159/13.

In the broadest sense, the conference was another in a series of attempts on the part of the French Command to obtain a greater return from available British Forces, but, as always, in accordance with French strategic planning. The thrust of Joffre's plea in early August for a more rapid initial concentration of the BEF, his demand that the Force assemble in its original concentration zone rather than at Amiens, and his request to Sir John on August 16 that the BEF move forward more rapidly had all been aimed at obtaining maximum participation from the British Force in the first great battles. These having failed, a new plan was devised and the British were again requested to redouble their efforts in order to delay the rapid advance of the German Armies. Joffre thus attempted at every juncture to obtain the maximum participation from available British forces, which he had come to count on more and more heavily as an essential element in his strategic plans.

But Joffre, intent on stalling the German advance, was not content to work with available British forces only when others might be had in London. Thus, before his departure from St. Quentin in the early afternoon, the French Chief turned to the matter of British reinforcements.[52] Having received an alarming report from London that Kitchener was an "enemy of the offensive," excessively stubborn and holding back British forces for the creation of a new army in order to have a large army at the time of peacemaking,[53] Joffre, who suspected Kitchener's interference in British operations, inquired of Sir John on the likelihood of his receiving the 6th Division (also the sixth to come).[54] Fearing the Government's acceptance of a project then being discussed to send that division to Belgium (3000 Royal Marines already having been ordered by Churchill to Ostend), Sir John agreed fully with Joffre on the necessity for reinforcements on the French front.[55] In this case (as in many others later), the operational interests of the British Force in the field linked it with the strategic aims of the French Command in opposition to the military policy and grand strategy of the British Government. Collaborating with the French Command against his own Government for the first time, Sir John thus wrote a strong plea to Kitchener that very day for dispatch of the Sixth Division to France, arguing that it was badly needed to strengthen his force and would serve no useful purpose against German reserves in Belgium.[56]

---

[52] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 318-19.

[53] Panouse to Ministre de la Guerre, 19 August, 1914, AG, 16N1905, dos. 1, #46 (stamped by the GQG with the notation "arrived the 24/8/1914"). (The French War Office's delay of five days in transmission of this communication would suggest that no adjustment had yet been made to the leisurely cadence of peace-time administration.) Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of 24 August, 1914, p. 55.

Sir John's urgent request, however, merely served to arouse the ire of Kitchener, who no longer had the authority to dispatch British divisions at will. Presented to the Cabinet, Sir John's plea met the combined opposition of Asquith, Grey, and Kitchener, who opposed the dispatch of any further forces to the continent until the needs of home defence were more adequately met by the arrival of battalions from the garrison outposts of the Empire. The 6th Division, in consequence, was retained in Britain as guarantee against invasion until after Kitchener's visit to Paris on September 1 during the command crisis.[57]

---

[54] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 316, 318.

[55] Ibid.; T MO5 no. 12, Kitchener to Military Attaché, [For the British Command], Paris, 26 August, 1914, Grey Papers, PRO, FO/800/55, pp. 193-94 gives information on the dispatch of troops to Ostend; see Kitchener to French, 27 August, 1914, reproduced in Arthur, Kitchener, III, 39-40. For an account of Churchill's role in these diversions, see below, Chapter IX.

[56] T., French to Kitchener, 27 [obviously the 26th] August, 1914, Kitchener Private Office Papers, PRO, WO 159/13. Letter, French to Kitchener, 27 August, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49. WA/11.

The incident was significant not for the results obtained, which were negligible, but because it established a pattern in Sir John's relationship with Joffre while dealing with Kitchener and the British Government. Whatever his differences with Joffre, Sir John, because of the operational demands of the field, could always be counted upon to support Joffre against Kitchener and the Cabinet in order to obtain what was soon to become a major French preoccupation: the dispatch of every available British unit to the western front. The allocation of forces between fronts being normally an attribute of government, Joffre once again became deeply involved in the military policy and grand strategy of the British Government. And the British, as will be shown, having committed the BEF to action in France, were to find that under the pressure of urgent demands from the field, as crisis succeeded military crisis, had little recourse but to yield to an ever-increasing military commitment to the French.

The Near Collapse of Allied Military Relations After the Battle of Le Cateau

The Battle of Le Cateau had a devastating psychological impact on the British Command. Whatever degree of confidence Joffre had restored in French leadership and planning at St. Quentin simply evaporated as exaggerated results of the engagement plunged the British Command into a sharp depression. Sharing uncritically the emotional fluctuations which succeeded each other at British Headquarters, Huguet painted the unfortunate engagement in its darkest hue.[58] "Battle lost by the English Army which appears to have lost all cohesion," he reported to Joffre on the night of August 26. "To be reconstituted," he said, "it will ask to be seriously protected."[59] During the night, Sir John also sent "most urgent messages" to the commanders of the French Cavalry on his left and the Fifth Army on his right, insisting that pressure be taken off the retreat of his beleagured Force.[60]

---

[57] Personal letters, Grey to Prime Minister, 26-8-14 and Asquith to Kitchener, 27 August, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/74 WR/4; Kitchener to French, 27 August, 1914, reproduced in Arthur, Kitchener, III, 139-41 and Ibid., p. 62. Kitchener had previously been limited in his capacity to dispatch troops to the front without the approval of the Prime Minister. (Letter, Asquith to Kitchener, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/74 WR/14.) For a very premature announcement of the Division's dispatch, see CT #456, Cambon to Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, 27 August, 1914, AE, Série "Guerre 1914-1918," vol. 534, p. 70.

The Battle of Le Cateau ended effective cooperation in the field between the British and French Armies. Though only partially aware of his losses, then estimated at 3000 - 4000, Sir John's major concern on August 27 was to retreat as rapidly as possible behind the Oise (south of Noyon) in an attempt to shake off the enemy and to find shelter behind a major barrier in order to refit and reorganize.[61] He therefore refused Joffre's demand to proceed with a methodical retreat and, withdrawing rapidly, abandoned the mission of covering the French left flank despite French promises of support on his left and a vigourous attack on his right.[62] His mind now centred totally on the safety of the Force.

---

[58] See Joffre, Mémoires, I, 322-23; cf. Messimy, Souvenirs, pp. 282-83; Spears, Liaison, p. 243.

[59] CT #100, Huguet to GQG, 26 August, [1914], 8:15 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(I), no. 634; cf. Joffre, Mémoires, I, 320.

[60] Letter, French to Kitchener, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/11; cf. Huguet to GQG, 27 August, 1914, received at 8:15 a.m., AFGG, I(II) A(I), no. 826.

[61] Letter, French to Kitchener, 27 August, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/11; cf. French, 1914, pp. 86-87 and Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entries of August 27, 1914.

Sir John's retreat to the Oise also signified partial abandonment of Joffre's newly unveiled Aisne plan. The British, according to Joffre's directive, were to have halted on the Somme, a full day's march in front of the Oise.[63] Indeed, confidence in the new French plan at British Headquarters was fast waning. Even Wilson, the most ardent of French supporters, explained to Brécard, a French Staff officer sent to the British with promises of French support, how "useless" Joffre's present plans were which called for the British "protecting his left" flank. "Another Corps to Amiens (7th) will simply be caught by the Germans," said Wilson. "I told him [Joffre] to get the 5th Corps up here from Alsace & then we could advance again."[64]

The Le Cateau defeat, moreover, revived all the old recriminations against the French Command, this time in even more acrid and acrimonious form. "The British again reproach us bitterly for not having sustained them," wrote Alexandre.[65] Defeat of the only immediately available force in the Empire could also have serious political implications, as Sir John, who was charged with their safety, was well aware. Observing that bitterness and regret were bound to arise in Britain once it was learned under what conditions the British had been engaged against the enemy, Sir John suggested to Joffre on August 27 that he express his gratitude for the "great services rendered to the common cause by the English Army."[66] That, presumably, would calm public opinion and deflect blame from Sir John for the unfortunate engagement. Sensitive to political considerations, Joffre responded immediately by warmly thanking the British Army, both via Sir John and through his Government, for "not hesitating to fully engage against very superior forces," thereby "assuring the security of the left flank of the French Army."[67] These "heartfelt" thanks, however, were not without critical comment at GQG. Their purpose, wrote Berthelot, was to strengthen the "hope" that the British "will not continue to vanish."[68]

---

[62] #2378, GQG to Huguet, 27 August, 1914, 6:45 a.m., AFGG, I(II) A(I), no. 800 and n. 2, p. 530.

[63] #2349, Instruction générale no. 2, Commander-in-Chief to Commanders of Armies, 25 August, 1914, AFGG, I(II) A(I), no. 395.

[64] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of 27 August, 1914; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 323, 327-29. Clive also accompanied Brécard. (Ibid., p. 323.)

[65] Alexandre, Avec Joffre, entry of 27 August, 1914, p. 132.

As exaggerated reports of the disaster at Le Cateau arrived at British Headquarters on August 27,[69] Sir John and his Staff became even more despondent. If the purpose of battle is to instill psychological depression in the adversary, then the German victory of Le Cateau succeeded admirably. In a remarkable dispatch, Huguet reflected the badly depressed state of mind of the British Command. The BEF is, for the moment, "a beaten army incapable of serious effort," he reported. Serious losses in men, artillery and equipment by the 3rd and 5th Divisions have reduced them to a "scattered flock, unable to offer the least resistance," he continued, and they are incapable of reappearing on the battle field before "being rested and completely reconstituted." Although the First Corps and the 4th Division still possessed a "certain cohesion," Huguet concluded that the British Army "would be able to take up the campaign only after lengthy rest and reconstitution, that is to say, for three out of the five divisions, not before several days and even several weeks."[70] This report on the state of British forces, which had indeed been shaken but not seriously damaged, accurately reflected the state of mind of the British Command.

---

[66] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 323; cf. Huguet to Commander-in-Chief, 27 August, 1914, in Messimy, Souvenirs, A #17, pp. 409-11.

[67] Commander-in-Chief, French Armies, to Commander-in-Chief of English Armies, 27 August, 1914, 11h30, AE, Série "Guerre 1914-1918," vol. 534, p. 71; cf. AFGG, I(II) A(I), no. 791; Notes exchanged between officials at Ministères des Affaires Etrangères, August 27, 28, 1914, AE, Série "Guerre 1914-1918," vol. 534, p. 72; cf. Joffre, Mémoires, I, 323. Spears claims that Joffre was at British Headquarters at Noyon at 11:00 a.m. on August 27, but does not give the substance of the discussion. (Spears, Liaison, p. 244.) Joffre, however, makes no mention of the visit in his Mémoires (see Joffre, Mémoires, I, 322-31), nor does Berthelot in his Diary (Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 28, 1914, pp. 67ff).

[68] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 27, 1914, p. 66.

[69] Huguet, Britain and the War, p. 72; cf. Spears, Liaison, pp. 245-58 and n. 1, p. 247.

The implications were serious for the future of the campaign. The British Government, wrote Huguet, reflecting the depression of the British Command as well as their attempt to second-guess the Government under the circumstances, might require the BEF to be "drawn back altogether to its base at Le Havre until the time when, refitted, rested and reorganized, it would be in condition to take up the campaign." The French should therefore "no longer count on the British Army for some time," Huguet warned sternly, noting the grave dangers for Lanrezac's left which would result from British "shortening of the line."[71] That warning was to prove prophetic. German strategy, which struck at the Allied flank, also struck at the heart of the military coalition, dividing the British, now intent on self-preservation, from their French Allies. The strategy was proving very successful.

---

[70] Huguet to Commander-in-Chief, 27 August, 1914, in Messimy, Souvenirs, A #17, pp. 409-11; also in Joffre, Mémoires, I, 328-29.

[71] Huguet to Commander-in-Chief, 27 August, 1914, quoted in full in Messimy, Souvenirs, A #17, pp. 409-11 and Joffre, Mémoires, I, 329-31; cf. Huguet, Britain and the War, p. 72; Spears, Liaison, pp. 245-46. Wilson, generally optimistic, was also somewhat shaken. (Ibid., p. 247). French, Wilson reported, was "broken down in trying to [do] the work [for] Archie [Murray] & me for our boys." (Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 28, 1914.) For an objective evaluation of the state of the BEF at this time, see below.

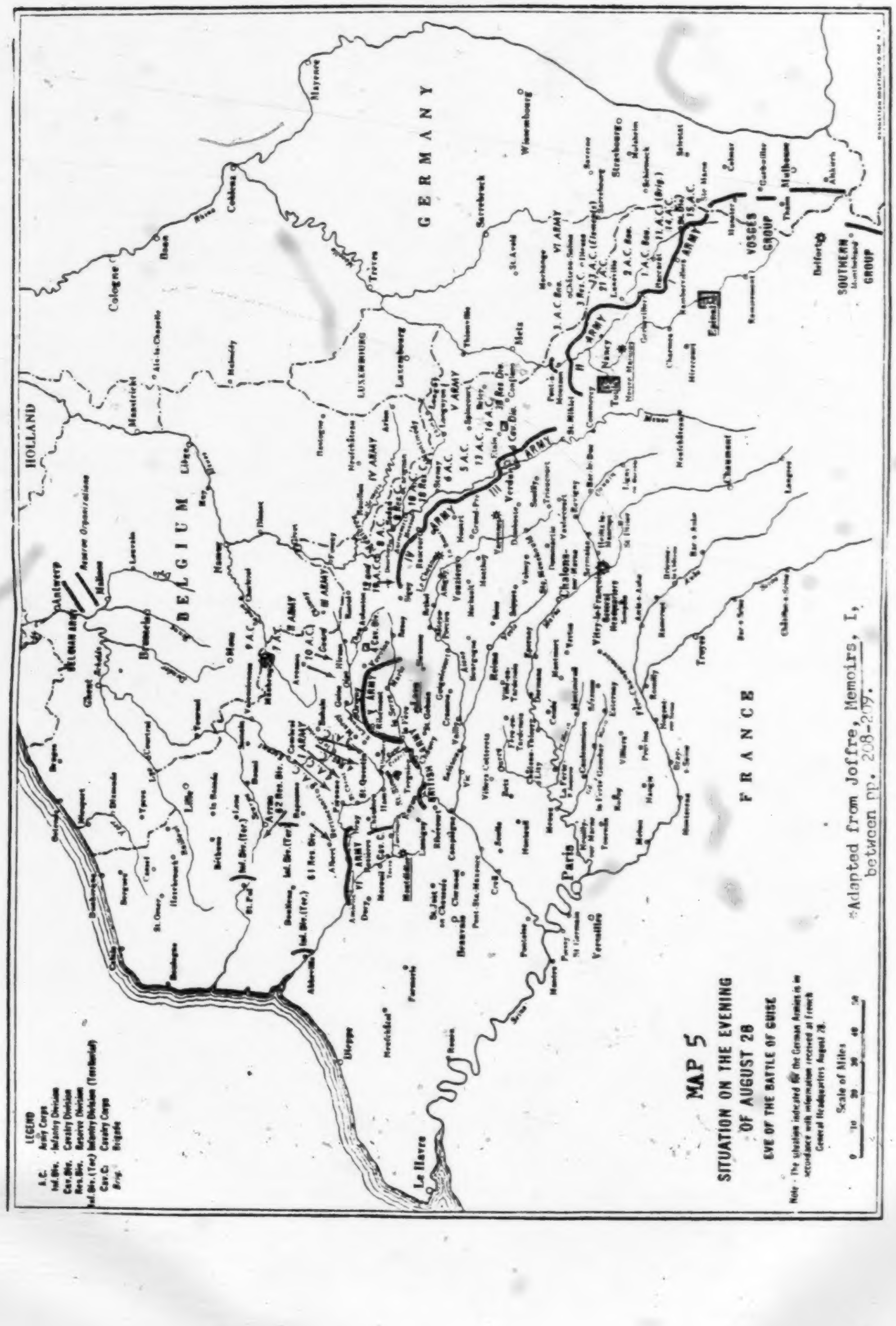
If renewed recrimination and despair on the part of the British Command followed the Le Cateau engagement, the rapid retreat of the British Army after the battle in turn gave rise to bitter French recrimination, this time from the French Command, for that retreat seriously uncovered the inner flanks of both the Sixth and Fifth French Armies. Hitherto, since August 22, the forward position of the BEF had effectively shielded the French Fifth Army from the German flanking movement, while the Fifth Army, little pressed by Bülow's Second Army after the Battle of Charleroi,[72] had retired leisurely to the rear of the British. After the Battle of Le Cateau that situation was reversed. On August 26, the British executed a long retreat to escape German pursuit after the Le Cateau engagement. While the Fifth Army slowly moved into its position behind the northern bend of the Oise on August 27, the British again carried out a long march to the rear to safety about Ham behind the Somme, and First Corps' retreat from St. Quentin during the day brought the BEF for the first time to the rear of Lanrezac's Army, uncovering his left flank.[73]

French recrimination was immediate and severe. "To completely

---

[72] See Lanrezac, Plan de campagne, pp. 212-13 on this point.

[73] See Map 5, p. 205. For the relationship of the two Armies to each other since August 25, see AFGG, I(II), Map #6, "Location of the Vth Army and the British Army on August 25, 1914, at nightfall"; Map #7, "Movement of the British Army on August 26, 1914, and location of the Vth Army at nightfall"; Map #8, "Location of the Vth Army and the British Army on August 27, 1914, at nightfall."


LEGEND
A.C. Army Corps
Inf. Div. Infantry Division
Cav. Div. Cavalry Division
Res. Div. Reserve Division
Inf. Div. (Ter.) Infantry Division (Territorial)
Cav. C. Cavalry Corps
Brig. Brigade
HOLLAND
BELGIUM
GERMANY
LUXEMBOURG
FRANCE
Paris
Antwerp
Brussels
Cologne
Coblenz
Metz
Strasbourg
Nancy
Verdun
Reims
Le Havre
BRITISH ARMY
VOSGES GROUP
SOUTHERN GROUP
Scale of Miles
0 10 20 30 40 50

MAP 5

SITUATION ON THE EVENING OF AUGUST 28

EVE OF THE BATTLE OF GUISE

Note - The situation indicated for the German Armies is in accordance with information received at French General Headquarters August 28.

*Adapted from Joffre, Memoirs, I, between pp. 208-209.

uncover the left of General Lanrezac," said a message to British Headquarters (signed by Berthelot), "just as he is going to counter-attack, would put him in a critical position." Reaffirming the promised support of two French reserve divisions and the Cavalry Corps on the British left, the French Command concluded: "The situation is in no way critical."[74] "But all that is of little importance to them," wrote Berthelot in his diary. "They want to escape from the Germans, in coming if need be behind the Vth Army."[75] After Le Cateau, Anglo-French conflict, in effect, not only centred on Sir John and Lanrezac, as previously, but involved the two Commands.

The British, retreating on the 27th, barely evaded German cavalry, which was reported at Péronne the same evening. "This excessively grave situation," threatening to the British left flank, "is the object of very unfavourable commentary," wrote Huguet. The timely action of d'Amade's divisions north of Péronne the same day slowed German pursuit of the British and saved their left.[77] Engaged the next day, however, the two French reserve divisions suffered heavy losses,[78] leaving no effective barrier on the British left to stop the wide-swinging advance of von Kluck's First Army launched on the futile mission of driving the British southwesterly to their ports.[79] The action on August 27 served to illustrate the basic fact that French strategy had not yet come to grips with the full extent of the German flanking movement. Even without the British defeat of Le Cateau, only ineffectual rearguard actions would have been possible by the Allied extreme left against such overwhelming forces.

---

[74] #2478, Telephone Message, [GQG to] Huguet, 27 August, 1914, 2:00 p.m., signed H. Berthelot, AFGG, I(II) A(I), no. 810 and n. 1, p. 542; cf. Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 27, 1914, p. 65; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 323.

[75] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 27, 1914, p. 67.

[76] Huguet to GQG, 27/8 [1914], 5:45 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(I), no. 829; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 324; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of 28 August, 1914, p. 67. Spears claims the news of the arrival of German cavalry at Péronne was false but cites no evidence. (Spears, Liaison, p. 246.)

[77] Huguet to Commander-in-Chief, [GQG], 28 August, 1914, 8:45 a.m., AFGG, I(II) A(I), no. 996.

[78] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 29, 1914.

In response to the British defeat at Le Cateau, Joffre significantly altered French plans in an attempt to hold the British in the line. Very anxious about the "fragility" of his extreme left wing and concerned about the British attitude after meeting with them at St. Quentin on the 26th, Joffre assumed nonetheless that Huguet's bleak report on the night of August 26 of a British disaster was exaggerated[80] and that the BEF would soon "recover" if properly protected.[81] Much was at stake. Precipitous retreat of the BEF would uncover the Sixth Army just as it was beginning to form about Amiens, and British retreat, now deflected southward, would expose the left flank of the Fifth Army to immediate danger.[82] In the hope of slowing down and taking pressure off the British retreat, therefore, and in attempt to slow down the overall forward movement of the German right wing, so essential for the success of the manoeuvre, Joffre decided early on the morning of August 27 to launch a vigourous attack by the Fifth Army.[83] The Battle of Guise, which produced such significant results, was thus initiated largely for the benefit of the British, whose role had begun to loom very large indeed in French strategic planning.

---

[79] HGW (1914), I, 233.

[80] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 319-20.

[81] Ibid., pp. 321-32.

[82] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 320-22; see also Berthelot, Diary, I, 64.

[83] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 321-22.

That attack, however, had to be imposed. Although Lanrezac had indicated his intention on August 25 of attacking once he was out of the wooded Ardennes country,[84] his orders to the Fifth Army to fall back on August 27 behind the Oise and the Thon actually showed that he would not follow through.[85] Joffre, therefore, ordered him in very strong language on August 27 to mount a vigourous offensive to the north in the Vervins region, without concerning himself with the action of the British on his left.[86] Later in the day, when news arrived that elements of two corps of von Bülow's Army had been left behind for the investment of Maubeuge, Joffre considered it safe to orient Lanrezac's attack directly across the Oise to the northwest in the direction of St. Quentin, against enemy forces marching on the British, to more effectively take the pressure off their retreat.[87] Joffre advised the British Command immediately of his orders to Lanrezac and also his instructions to Sordet to cover their left flank. But neither his exhortations to proceed with a methodical retreat so as not to uncover Lanrezac's flank, nor his promises of support via Brécard, had any impact on the British.[88] Even Wilson, as noted, had given up the idea of defending the French left wing, the British having already begun their rapid retreat to safety behind the Oise.[89] Learning from Brécard of the dire state of affairs of the British on the evening of August 27, Joffre had no alternative but to abandon the Somme between Ham and Tergnier as the starting point for British advance in his new manoeuvre[90] in favour of the more distant Oise about Noyon, a full day's march further to the rear.[91] He, nonetheless, had not yet given up hope in the overall plan, as witnessed by his violent interview with Lanrezac the next day.

---

[84] T., 5th Army [to GQG], 25 August, 1914, Berthelot, Diary, I, A #34, pp. A34-35; Spears, Liaison, p. 214; cf. Joffre, Mémoires, I, 317-22.

[85] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 322. Cf. Lanrezac, Plan de campagne, pp. 317-18.

[86] Message of General Joffre [to Lanrezac], 27 August, [1914], 6:30 a.m., Berthelot, Diary, I, A #34, p. A35; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 322; Lanrezac, Plan de campagne, p. 218 and n. 1. Lanrezac claims the order was delivered verbally by the liaison officer. (Ibid.)

[87] CT #250, Commander-in-Chief to V Army, 27 August, 1914, 8:10 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(I), no. 817 and n. 1, p. 545; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 325-26; cf. Lanrezac, Plan de campagne, p. 218 and n. 1.

On August 28, the French Fifth Army halted its retreat behind the Oise above La Fère and changed its orientation to the northwest for an attack across the river to the northwest.[92] Joffre, however, had been informed of Lanrezac's reluctance to attack and the demoralization of his Staff. To toughen the resolve of his unruly subordinate, Joffre personally visited Lanrezac at his Headquarters on August 28.[93] A violent argument ensued in which Joffre threatened the dejected Lanrezac with replacement, blamed him entirely for British defeats at Mons and

---

[88] #2378, [GQG] to Huguet, August 27, 1914, 6:45 a.m., AFGG, I(II) A(I), no. 800 and n. 2, p. 538; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 323-24; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 27, 1914.

[89] The first stage of that retreat to the Somme about Ham was executed on August 27.

[90] See Joffre, Mémoires, I, 324-25.

[91] French to Kitchener, 27 August, 1914, quoted in Arthur, Kitchener, III, 42.

[92] Lanrezac, Plan de campagne, pp. 221-24.

[93] Alexandre, Avec Joffre, entry of August 27, 1914, p. 131; see Joffre, Mémoires, I, 331; cf. Lanrezac, Plan de campagne, pp. 218-19.

Le Cateau, and gave him his order to attack in the strongest terms as a mission of national survival. Only after receipt of Joffre's written order, drawn up on the spot, to attack "as soon as possible the forces which acted against the English Army yesterday" did Lanrezac declare himself satisfied and ready to march.[94] This violent scene was but one in a series of vigourous measures taken by Joffre to raise morale,[95] noticeably sagging "in all spheres of the Army and even at Grand quartier général" as the painful retreat from the frontier continued.[96] It demonstrated Joffre's stolid combativity and unshakeable resolution in the face of extreme adversity. The need for Lanrezac to reorient his direction of march, nonetheless, made it impossible to attack before dawn on the 29th, despite further GQG urgings to make haste.[97]

At the same time, Joffre attempted to obtain at least limited British support for the engagement. On August 28, as the BEF moved behind the Oise about Noyon and La Fère,[98] Joffre expressed renewed concern that precipitous retreat of British forces from the Somme would break the continuity of his front.[99] He therefore asked the British to maintain their rearguard forward behind the Crozat Canal between the Somme and Oise with a view to holding the position defensively in conjunction with Lanrezac's attack the next day.[100] Sir John refused, stating that his troops were too tired to cooperate in the desired measure and required at least a day's rest on their new positions (behind the Oise). They could then occupy the Canal line if necessary, he said, and if the French Army were victorious, his troops would be put at Joffre's disposal as a reserve.[101] This unusual offer reflected the demoralized state of mind of the British Command, which also considered on the same day the dissolution of the 5th Division and its integration with other divisions.[102]

---

[94] Lanrezac, Plan de campagne, pp. 224-27; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 332; Commander-in-Chief to Commander of V Army at Marle, 28 August, 1914, 9:00 a.m., AFGG, I(II) A(I), no. 987.

[95] With unshakeable confidence Joffre restored the morale of a demoralized Staff officer on August 29 with the reassurance that "On les aura" [We will have them]. (Alexandre, Avec Joffre, entry of August 29, 1914, pp. 132-33.

[96] On the growing discouragement of the Army and the High Command, see Joffre, Mémoires, I, 319.

[97] Lanrezac, Plan de campagne, pp. 228-29.

[98] "Location of the Vth Army and the British Army on August 28, 1914, at nightfall," AFGG, I(II), Map #9.

[99] Huguet to Commander-in-Chief, 28 August, 1914, 8:45 a.m., AFGG, I(II) A(I), no. 996; Telephone message, #2633, Commander-in-Chief

Haig, on the other hand, whose troops had fought but little and were in good condition, agreed privately with Lanrezac to have his Corps advance on the left of the Fifth Army in its attack[103] only to have his orders countermanded on the day of the attack by Sir John, who wished all his troops to have a day's rest on the 29th.[104] Thus, neither Joffre nor

---

to Huguet, 28 August, [1914], 5:20 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(I), no. 991 and n. 3, p. 665. Telephone message [Mission at British Headquarters to GQG], 28 August, 1914, 5:35 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(I), no. 909 and n. 3, p. 671; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 334.

[100] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 334; cf. Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 28, 1914.

[101] CT #109, Huguet to GQG, 28 August, [1914], 6:55 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(I), no. 1000; cf. Spears, Liaison, p. 259; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 29, 1914, p. 69.

[102] Huguet to General-in-Chief, 28 August, 1914, 8:45 a.m., AFGG, I(II) A(I), no. 996.

[103] Lanrezac, Plan de campagne, pp. 229-30; Spears, Liaison, pp. 255-57.

[104] Lanrezac, Plan de campagne, pp. 230-31; British HQ to V Army, 28 August, 1914 (arrived the 29th August, 1:00 a.m.), AFGG, I(II) A(I), no. 1003 and n. 3, p. 672; see also Spears, Liaison, pp. 258-59. The

Lanrezac, who was aroused to fury by this British "act of abandonment,"[105] were able to obtain British participation in the French attack. As a result, while Lanrezac's Fifth Army moved forward against the enemy below Guise on August 29, the British Army, having shaken off the enemy, had a much deserved day of rest in its billets behind the Oise. That was indeed fair turn about for Lanrezac's desertion of Sir John at Mons. Nonetheless, the zig-zag action of the Allies, who engaged the enemy separately, indicated that the military coalition was not functioning properly and that valuable resources were being frittered away in independent actions.

The Battle of Guise was a French victory, a turning point in French fortunes. Unlike the engagement at Charleroi, Lanrezac committed his entire force. Moving his left (the reserve divisions and XVIII Corps) forward across the Oise in the direction of St. Quentin, Lanrezac delivered a sharp blow against the advancing right wing of von Bülow's Second Army. The German flanking wing in effect had by now moved so far to the French left that Lanrezac encountered not von Kluck's First Army but von Bülow's troops in pursuit of the British Army.[106]

Taken by surprise, von Bülow ordered his left (Guard and Xth Corps), which was already south of the Oise, to move forward in order to take the pressure off his right. While Joffre, who had come to stiffen Lanrezac's resolve, passed the morning silently at Fifth Army Headquar-

---

British Army in effect lost effective contact with the enemy on August 28. (Ibid., p. 260.)

[105] Lanrezac, Plan de campagne, p. 231; Spears, Liaison, p. 258.

[106] For accounts of the Battle of Guise, see Goutard, La Marne, pp. 167-68; Lanrezac, Plan de campagne, pp. 231-40; Spears, Liaison, pp. 264-73; AFGG, I(II), pp. 68-85; Reichsarchiv, Der Weltkrieg, III, 151-59; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 338-40; AFGG, I(II), Maps #9-12.

ters, Lanrezac, demonstrating that he had the capacity if not the will for very fine generalship, mounted every available force against von Bülow's attack across the Oise and, concentrating superior forces at the decisive point, won a substantial victory. In the night von Bülow withdrew his forces northward behind the Oise. Although Lanrezac's left was thrust back to its starting point, the advance of the German Second Army had been temporarily checked. Even more significant was the consequent decision of von Bülow to alter the objective and direction of his advance.[107]

The British Command, however, were unmoved by the promise of a vigourous attack at Guise. The depression which had settled over the British in fact grew deeper as more information was received on their rout at Le Cateau. On August 28, Sir John had received full figures on British losses since the beginning of hostilities: 15,000 men and 80 guns.[108] These figures, which now appear quite accurate on the loss of men[109] but grossly exaggerated on the loss of field artillery,[110] convinced Sir John "that no effective stand could be made until we were able to improve our condition."[111] At a meeting with his corps commanders called to consider the situation on August 29, Smith-Dorrien "expressed it as his opinion that the only course open to us was to retire to our base, thoroughly refit, reembark, and try to land at some favourable point on the coastline."[112]

---

[107] See footnote 106 above.

[108] French, 1914, p. 87.

[109] See HGW (1914), I, 238; cf. Maurice, Lessons, p. 10.

[110] Thirty-eight guns were lost at Le Cateau, according to the Official British History (HGW (1914), I, 191), and only two guns were lost in the methodical retreat from Mons on August 23 and 24 (Ibid., I, 92, 113). To September 5, 1914, total loss of guns was 44 or 45. (Ibid., I, 286.) (Cf. French, 1914, p. 78, who at one point wrongly attributes all his losses of guns and men to date to the Le Cateau engagement.)

[111] French, 1914, p. 87.

Sir John, despite his later denial of listening to this "counsel of despair,"[113] indeed gave application to much of it. General Robb, Inspector-General of Communications at Rouen, the new British advanced base, was thus advised the same day "that the Commander-in-Chief has decided to make a prolonged and definite retreat due south, passing to the west or east of Paris."[114] When news of this reached Kitchener via Robb on the 30th, French feebly attempted to deny the rumour of his intention to "make any prolonged and definite retreat." In the same letter, however, he confirmed his decision to "retreat behind the Seine in a southwesterly direction west of Paris." "This means marching for some 8 days," he wrote, "without fatiguing the troops at a considerable distance from the enemy."[115] Thus, the British Command decided, even while the battle of Guise was in progress, to give up further immediate action in concert with the French, avoid the enemy, and flee to safety.

---

[112] Ibid., p. 93.

[113] Ibid.

[114] T Q 590, Inspector-General of Communications, Rouen, to War Office, 29 August, 1914; CT #738, War Office to Inspector-General of Communications, 30 August, 1914; T. No. GW 137, Inspector-General of Communications to War Office, 30 August, 1914, HGW (1914), I, (2nd ed.), Appendix 22 (1-3), pp. 473-74. (This appendix was deleted from HGW (1914), I (3rd ed.) used throughout unless otherwise stated.) The quotation is from the latter telegram. Cf. Arthur, Kitchener, III, 45-46; Huguet, Britain and the War, p. 72. See Letter, French to Kitchener, 27 August, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/11, which indicates that the advanced base had already been transferred from Amiens to Rouen on that date.

[115] T F 54, French to Kitchener, 31 August, 1914, HGW (1914), I, (2nd ed.), Appendix 22 (5), pp. 474-75 and Arthur, Kitchener, III, 46-47. That this telegram was written late on the 30th is evidenced by the reference to the Battle of Guise as having taken place "yesterday," the 29th.

In his decision to abandon the field, Sir John was overly pessimistic, for even his Second Corps was not nearly so battered as he supposed,[116] and the loss of about 12.5 per cent of his men,[117] although heavy, was not so high as to destroy his fighting capabilities. Both British and French divisions were to demonstrate later the capacity to continue offensive action with as little as half their effectives.[118] Nor was his presumed loss of 80 guns, or almost one-fifth of his artillery,[119] totally debilitating, although it certainly was serious. In effect, Sir John had widely overreacted to his losses, not appreciating, in his depressed state of mind, the full demands of European warfare and the capacity of his troops to fight well under less than optimum circumstances. His assumption, moreover, based on his instructions, that the Government would support his action, badly missed the mark.

To hold the British in the line would thus be the renewed task of the French General-in-Chief and the subject of another conference called three days after the St. Quentin meeting. "Nothing will any longer stop the English, who wish to rally and refit on the lower

---

[116] Spears, Liaison, pp. 246, 248. See loss figures, HGW (1914), I, 238.

[117] Sir John's Army consisted of 5½ divisions of 18,000 men each and a cavalry division of 9,000 men, approximately 120,000 men in total. (See HGW (1914), I, 6-7, for wartime strengths of the BEF.)

[118] See below, Chapter XI.

[119] Each infantry division was equipped with 76 guns, and the cavalry division with 20, for a total of 438 guns. (See HGW (1914), I, 6-7 for wartime strengths.)

Seine,"[120] wrote Alexandre on August 28, and indeed, Huguet's letters of August 27 and 28 had apprised Joffre fully of the British state of mind.[121]

On August 29 Joffre responded to these rumours with a second visit to British Headquarters. "The rumour had come to me," wrote Joffre, "that French himself and his government turned their regards toward their maritime bases, and I feared that in his desire to draw nearer to them, the Marshal might leave our battle line for a long while, which would have made any resumption of the offensive impossible."[122] Joffre had also been fully informed of the British intention to retreat from the Oise to the line Compiègne-Soissons on the Aisne, which would fully expose the left and rear of the Fifth Army and entirely ruin his Aisne plan. His immediate purpose therefore was to hold the British in the line between his Sixth and Fifth Armies, and, if possible, to further engage them in offensive actions. After spending the morning of August 29 with Lanrezac at Laon to make sure that he engaged fully, the French Chief thus called on the British at Compiègne for what was to be an even less successful conference than the last.[123]

Accounts of Joffre's visit give the impression that he treated

---

[120] Alexandre, Avec Joffre, entry of 28 August, 1914, p. 132.

[121] Huguet to Commander-in-Chief, 27 August, [1914], quoted in Messimy, Souvenirs, A #17, pp. 409-11; Huguet to Commander-in-Chief, 28 August, 1914, 8:45 a.m., AFGG, I(II) A(I), no. 996.

[122] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 340.

[123] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 29, 1914, p. 76; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 324-25; cf. Telephone message #16/3, Duruy (liaison officer sent to English on August 29) to Vth Army, 29 August, 1914, at 11:00 a.m., AFGG, I(II) A(I), no. 1192, which confirms British inability to engage in offensive action (as Lanrezac had asked of French) until the 31st. The message indicates that the British would be behind the Oise at the level of Noyon on the 30th but does not disclose their plan of march for that day.

Sir John in an imperious and authoritarian manner. In the presence of Gamelin, Joffre advanced a number of arguments to French and Murray intended to strengthen their will to fight and stay in the line in a forward position. He began by summarizing the fighting of the Fifth Army on the Oise and frankly indicated the difficult position of the reserve divisions on Lanrezac's left. To what extent Joffre intended to incriminate the British, who had refused the support of their First Corps, one may only guess. British maintenance of the line between the Fifth and Sixth Armies was essential, he argued, in order to prevent a gap in the Allied battle line. The Russian offensive in East Prussia, he argued, would oblige the Germans to divert forces to the east and thus reduce pressure on the western front. If the British could remain as far forward as the French until the Sixth Army was definitively constituted, Joffre continued, circumstances would undoubtedly be more favourable for the resumption of a general offensive. Joffre then again suggested that the British advance to the Crozat Canal joining the Somme and the Oise. That Canal would be a suitable obstacle, he said, behind which resistance would be much easier.[124]

French and his Staff, who appeared "reticent and embarrassed"[125] to Gamelin, probably because of their decision earlier in the day to drop out of the line altogether, would not comply with Joffre's request. "I remained firm in my absolute conviction," wrote Sir John, "that the British forces could not effectively fulfil their share of such action for some days and that, so far as we were concerned, a further retreat was inevitable."[126]

---

[124] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 340-41; see Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 133; French, 1914, p. 92; cf. French to Kitchener, [30 August, 1914], quoted in Arthur, Kitchener, III, 46-47; Spears, Liaison, pp. 276-77.

[125] Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 133.

The interaction between Sir John and the cautious Murray on this occasion (Wilson being absent) is recorded by Joffre:

> While I spoke, I very distinctly saw his Chief of Staff, Sir Archibald Murray, pulling him by the bottom of his tunic, as if to restrain him from acquiescing to my requests. As a result, all I could obtain from the latter was: 'No, no, my troops need 48 hours absolute rest. After I have been able to give them that, I will be ready to participate in whatever you want to do, but not before.'[127]

Sir John, in fact, warmly advocated further retreat, drawing the Germans further from their bases, and then mounting a counter-offensive somewhere between the Seine and Marne, much as was done later.[128] He nonetheless "assured the French Commander-in-Chief that no serious gap would be made in his line by any premature and hasty retirement," a considerable concession, in view of his earlier decision to quit the line entirely. This, however, was coupled with the demand that adequate time be given to refit and obtain reinforcements.[129]

These assurances, though considered magnanimous by Sir John, were of little comfort to Joffre. His purpose was to have the British halt their retreat and move forward in order to salvage his Aisne manoeuvre. Information from aerial reconnaissance brought in by Murray, indicating that German forces had again caught up with the British, sealed British determination to withdraw further. "From that moment," wrote Joffre, "I understood that nothing was capable of shaking the Marshal's will. I had to leave without having obtained any results."[130]

---

[126] French, 1914, p. 92.

[127] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 341. Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 133-34 confirms this scene. See footnote 123 above.

[128] French, 1914, p. 92.

[129] Ibid.

Joffre, of course, was most irritated with the British Command. "I must confess that in leaving Compiègne I was in rather bad humour," he later wrote, fully blaming the British for the failure of the plan, "for it now became certain that the Amiens-Verdun manoeuvre had become inoperative and that it would be necessary to mount another."[131] The apprehensions so keenly felt by Joffre since the British defeat at Le Cateau had become reality.[132] They showed in his face. Undaunted and unshaken in his confidence,[133] Joffre nonetheless carried an air of noticeable fatigue and even dejection on that fateful evening.[134] To him it seemed that the British had ruined his plan.

Although the British were squarely blamed by the French Command for the failure of the Aisne manoeuvre, with Berthelot, among others, accusing them of "negligence" and "lack of solidarity" in exposing Lanrezac's flank just as he was about to attack,[135] the failure of the manoeuvre was the result of broader causes. The events of August 29 illustrate this point. While Lanrezac engaged von Bülow's Army at Guise, von Kluck's First Army, marching in a wide arc to the French left, dispersed the newly arrived elements of the Sixth Army at Proyart below the Somme. Not having had time to detrain and coalesce into a fighting force, the new Army was obliged to retreat and regroup behind the Avre River.[136]

---

[130] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 341; cf. Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 133-34; cf. French, 1914, p. 91.

[131] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 341, 345; see Joffre, La préparation de la guerre, p. 48; cf. Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 134.

[132] See Joffre, Mémoires, I, 317-41.

[133] "On en sortera tout de meme." "We will come out of it just the same," Joffre told Gamelin on the way home. (Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 134.)

[134] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 29, 1914; Huguet, Britain and the War, pp. 75-76.

[135] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 29, 1914, p. 70.

The Sixth Army thus defaulted simultaneously on its mission in the manoeuvre, which was to cover the British left flank on the Somme.[137] Had the British advanced behind the Crozat Canal, as Joffre desired, their left would have been caught by von Kluck's powerful advance. In reality, the French Command, in mounting the manoeuvre, had not fully appreciated the strength of the German right and as a result had not taken enough ground to the rear to allow for the concentration of the new Sixth Army. The British defeat at Le Cateau and the dispersion of the Sixth Army on its left were but symptoms of that miscalculation.

Other conversations, however, were in progress on August 29, which finally convinced the French Staff of the full magnitude of the problem on their left and awakened a false flicker of hope at British Headquarters in a continued French offensive. While Joffre was at British Headquarters, Brigadier-General Sir Henry Wilson, accompanied by Huguet, spent two and a half hours in sometimes acrid discussion with Belin and Berthelot at GQG. Using his persuasive powers to the fullest, Wilson attempted to convince Joffre's two senior advisors, who still appeared not to appreciate fully the extent of the German forces on the extreme Allied left, of the folly of an all-out attack by the Fifth Army against superior German forces at Guise and of the need for further retreat. It was imperative that a strong French Army be formed on the British left, he argued, instead of dispersed elements unable to resist the German advance.[138] These same views Wilson later presented to Joffre, as the two met briefly at Rheims on their way home that evening.[139] At the same time, Wilson, considered by Gamelin as "the most precious tie of Anglo-French solidarity," promised Joffre to use his influence on Sir John to persuade him to assist in a further French offensive at Guise the next day.[140]

---

[136] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 29, 30, 1914, pp. 69, 71; Joffre, La préparation de la guerre, p. 48; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 337-38, 345; AFGG, I(II), Map #18, "Situation of the VIth Army August 29, 1914, at 10:00 a.m." (engagement at Proyart) and Map #19, "Location of the VIth Army, August 29, 1914, at nightfall."

[137] Instruction particulière no. 19 to the VI Army, 27 August, 1914, Berthelot, Diary, I, A #35, pp. A35-36.

Wilson kept his word, with surprising effect. In a late night interview with Sir John, Huguet, Wilson's mouthpiece, "vigourously insisted" that Sir John maintain his positions and engage his right. A messenger also arrived from Lanrezac in the small hours of the morning making similar demands in view of the intended continuation of the battle. Sir John, of course, refused, orders having already been given to retire to the Aisne between Rethondes and Soissons, but the next morning he agreed to halt British retirement midway between the two rivers, not more than ten kilometres behind the Oise on the left and at Coucy-le-Chateau on the right, and to maintain contact with the French at La Fère with his rearguard. Circumstances being favourable on the 30th, the First Corps would then be moved forward to engage alongside the Fifth Army.[141] The British were again prepared to support a French attack.

---

[138] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 29, 1914; Huguet, Britain and the War, pp. 74-76.

[139] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 29, 1914; Huguet, Britain and the War, pp. 75-76.

[140] Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 134; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 341; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 29, 1914; Huguet, Britain and the War, pp. 75-76.

[141] CT #117, Huguet to Commander-in-Chief, [August 29, 1914],

The great difficulty experienced in obtaining even that limited and conditional support showed nevertheless that Allied military understanding had become very tenuous indeed and inadequate for the dire needs of the situation. Thus, already on August 30, Joffre had turned to the politicians for support in full recognition of the command crisis which had developed. "Will the English consent to engage?" wrote the well-informed Poincaré in his diary on August 30, reflecting not only the uncertainty of the entire situation but his growing involvement in operations. "Some say yes, some say no."[142]

However, to British dismay, the French decided to break off the Battle of Guise. Although Lanrezac had dealt a substantial blow to the German Second Army, which also slowed the pursuit of the German First Army, the retirement of the French Fourth Army on Lanrezac's right and further retreat of the British on his left made his forward position untenable.[143] The French Command considered the chief threat to be on Lan-

---

11:30 p.m., *AFGG*, I(II) A(I), no. 1194 and n. 2, p. 796; CT #118, Huguet to *GQG*, 30/8 [1914], 4:45 a.m., *AFGG*, I(II) A(II), no. 1418; Tel. message, Huguet to *GQG*, 30 August, [1914], 15 7:35 a.m., *AFGG*, I(II) A(II), no. 1419; [Huguet's minute], "*GQG*," 30 August, [1914], (possibly not dispatched), *AFGG*, I(II) A(II), no. 1424 and n. 1, p. 21 gives a full account of his activities. See Spears, *Liaison*, p. 276 for Lanrezac's attempt to engage the British.

[142] Poincaré Papers, XXXVI, "Notes Journalières," *BN*, NAF (16027), entry of August 30, [1914]. A badly cut document in *AFGG*, which is a telegram from Huguet to French Headquarters, dated August 30, 1914, 12:00 noon, reads, "I communicated to Marshal telephone communication [of] eight o'clock the same time [as] dispositions drawn up by ambassador . . . and . . . army," suggesting Poincaré may have already become involved in operations on August 30. (CT #110, Huguet to *GQG*, 30/8/14, 12:00 noon, *AFGG*, I(II) A(II), no. 1421). Maurice, who may have had inside information or access to documents now closed, also affirms that Joffre appealed to Millerand, the War Minister (possibly on August 30) prior to his formal appeal to Poincaré on the 31st. (See Maurice, *Lessons*, p. 11 and below.)

[143] Lanrezac, *Plan de campagne*, p. 240; Gamelin, *Manoeuvre*, pp. 134-35.

rezac's left, however, fearing that British retreat from the Oise would gravely endanger his left flank should von Kluck's First Army move to von Bülow's aid. Lanrezac was therefore ordered in the evening after Joffre's return to GQG to fall back behind the Serre.[144] With that order, the Aisne manoeuvre was definitively abandoned and retreat of the entire Allied left again begun. French strategy had failed again.

With the final collapse of the Aisne manoeuvre, the French Command found itself in a circumstance very similar to that after the lost "Battle of the Frontiers." The painful reality was that the French Command was again without a battle plan and faced with the "imperative necessity to continue the retreat" in the hope of buying time in order to put together a new defence. The question was "To where? Under what conditions?" should the retreat be continued. The scales, however, had now fallen from French eyes, thanks, at least in part, to Wilson's presentation on August 29. "It is certain that our left wing is insufficient," wrote Berthelot. The big problem was "How to reinforce it?" and "Within what time limits?"[145] The French had finally come to a realization of the inadequacy of their strategy in dealing with the wide-swinging envelopment of the German Schlieffen plan. They still, however, had no plan and would not have one for several days.

The collapse of the Aisne manoeuvre dealt the final blow to Sir John's short-lived resolve to support the French at Guise and led to the complete breakdown of working relations with the French Command. Informed on the morning of August 30 of the French decision to order a general retreat, Sir John was totally unimpressed with the new French strategy, whose unique objective was to avoid decisive engagements in order to "hold on the longest possible."[146] Joffre warmly thanked Sir John for his decision to stand and asked him, despite renewed French retreat, to remain forward in the line between the Fifth and Sixth Armies. Sir John rejected this mission and, although he was already more than a day's march behind the Fifth Army, at once renewed his own retreat beyond the grasp of the enemy. "The English Army [was] not in condition, whatever the circumstances, to take a place in the front line before 10 days," he said. As a result, he would not be able to fulfil the assigned mission of filling the gap between the Fifth and Sixth Armies on the Aisne.[147] He further asked that French approval be given for his retreat in four or five marches to the lower Seine west of Paris in order for him to reconstitute behind that waterway.[148] Few illusions thus remained for the French as to British intentions. Any immediate cooperation from the British in the field was entirely out of the question. Allied military relations had effectively collapsed.

---

[144] Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 134-35; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 353, 345-46; Lanrezac, Plan de campagne, pp. 241, 244. By an error on the part of the dispatch service, the order was not transmitted until 6:00 a.m. the next morning. (Joffre, Mémoires, I, 343, n. 1; Lanrezac, Plan de campagne, p. 242.)

[145] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 29, 1914, p. 71; cf. Joffre, Mémoires, I, 338, 345-49.

---

[146] #2838, Tel. message, [GQG to] Huguet, 30 August, [1914], 8:45 a.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1401; Huguet's note to GQG, 30 August, [1914], AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1424. This minute may not have been dispatched but contains valuable information on events at British Headquarters. Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 30, 1914, p. 72.

[147] #2838, Tel. message, [GQG to] Huguet, 30 August, [1914], 8:45 a.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1401; CT #110, Huguet to GQG, 30/8/14, 12:00 noon, AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1421; Huguet [to GQG], 30 August, [1914], AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1424; cf. Joffre, Mémoires, I, 346. AFGG, I(II) Maps #54, "General situation of the French Armies at nightfall on August 29, 1914."

[148] CT #112, Huguet to GQG, 30/8/14, 3:00 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1422.

The question was essentially one of confidence in the French Command. "I do not like General Joffre's plan," Sir John telegraphed to Kitchener on August 30, explaining his decision to abandon the field, even though the French victory at Guise had, in his own words, "greatly reduced pressure" on his centre and right.[149] "I should have liked [Joffre] to have assumed a vigourous offensive at once," he continued, "but he pleads in reply the present inability of the British Army to go forward as a reason for retirement and delay."[150] Sir John nonetheless held out some hope to Kitchener of an engagement in defence of Paris. Some reorganization could be undertaken during his retreat to the Seine, he said, and reinforcements might be sent up from the new base at La Rochelle to his new advanced base at Le Mans. From there they could be moved forward to his new position "behind the Seine," "which will be quite safe under the outlying forts of Paris."[151] But, as a private letter to Kitchener of the same date revealed, Sir John viewed the Seine more as a temporary stopping place in retreat to his base than as a place for a vigourous stand.

---

[149] T., French to Kitchener, 30 August, 1914, in Arthur, Kitchener, III, 46-47.

[150] Ibid.

[151] Ibid. For documentation on the acrimonious and confused discussions by which St. Nazaire, not La Rochelle, replaced Le Havre as a British sea base and lines of communication were established through advanced bases at both Le Mans and Saumur, see Berthelot, Diary, entries of August 30, 31, 1914, pp. 71, 73; Tel. message, Huguet to GQG, received 10:50 a.m., 30 August, 1914, AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1420 and n. 1, p. 19; Tel. message #2962, Commander-in-Chief to Huguet, 30 August, 1914, AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1414; Huguet to GQG, 30 August, 1914, AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1424; No. 340, "Memorandum on the organization of the communications of the English Army," 31 August, 1914, AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1627; Clive Diaries, II/I, KCMA, entry of Sept. 1, 1914; HGW (1914), I, 286-87; CT 475, Cambon to Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, 30 August, 1914 (Communiqué à la guerre le 30/8/1914), AE, Série "Guerre 1914-1918," vol. 534, p. 79. The British Government's offer of 6,000 men to defend Le Havre and Cherbourg which the French Government had just accepted thus became inoperative by the change of base. (Ibid.)

> I cannot say that I am happy in the outlook as to the further progress of the campaign in France [he wrote].[152] I am not sure that Joffre gets whole-hearted support from his generals, nor do I think that the commanders of armies and army corps are by any means the best that could have been chosen. There can be no doubt that a certain number of them have been placed in the positions they occupy for political reasons.[153]
>
> My confidence in the ability of the leaders of the French Army to carry this campaign to a successful conclusion is fast waning, and that is the real reason for the decision I have taken to move the British forces so far back.[154]
>
> . . .
>
> I feel most strongly the absolute necessity for retaining in my hands complete independence of action and power to retire on my base when circumstances render it necessary.[155]

Sir John's total loss of confidence in the French Command and the future of the campaign thus led him to abandon effective action in the field and to prepare for the retreat of the BEF to its base at the appropriate moment.[156] The bitter comment by Paul Reynaud in 1940 that "in an emergency, a British Commander would always make for the harbours," though exaggerated, was not far from the mark in this particular case.[157] Sir John indeed expected an Allied disaster on the scale of

---

[152] Personal letter, French to Kitchener, 30 August, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/12; also printed in Arthur, Kitchener, III, 48.

[153] This portion following n. 152 was excised from the letter in Arthur, Kitchener, III, 48.

[154] See also Spears, Liaison, p. 290 for an account of Sir John's "almost irremediable suspicion and mistrust."

[155] In reproducing this portion of the letter in his memoirs, Sir John French changed the word "when" to "should," considerably altering the sense. (See Arthur, Kitchener, III, 48, n. 1 and French, 1914, p.94.)

[156] See Spears, Liaison, p. 289, n. 1, p. 289 and Huguet to GQG, 30 August, [1914], AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1424 which add further substance to this latter conclusion.

[157] Bond, France and Belgium, p. 140.

Dunkirk in 1940. He thus showed foresight and prudence in preparing his line of retreat, which, incidentally, harmonized with Government policy, as shown by their prompt reallocation of bases further to the rear. But his assessment of the future was based on his depression after the defeat at Le Cateau and total loss of confidence in the French Command after the second failure of French strategy at Guise, rather than an objective assessment of the circumstances. He was, therefore, unduly pessimistic.

Kitchener's instructions, however, gave safety of the BEF priority over cooperation with the French, in line with the initial British concept of limited commitment to the continent, and, as such, seemed to justify Sir John's decision to fall out of the line. "I have been pressed very hard to remain even in my shattered condition, in the fighting line, but I have absolutely refused to do so," Sir John wrote, "and I hope you will approve of the course I have taken." "Not only is it in accordance with the spirit and letter of your instruction," he continued, "but it is dictated by common sense."[158] On that point, Sir John had a good case, which meant that those who differed with his stance in London would have to give him new instructions broadening British commitment to the French if they wished him to further cooperate with their Allies.

The crisis in the field, however, was essentially a command crisis based on Sir John's loss of confidence in French leadership. "Knowing what I do of the French soldier's fighting capabilities and the immense amount of energy, skill, time and trouble which for many years have been brought to bear upon their training and efficiency," Sir John continued, "I can attribute the constant failures to no other cause than defective higher leading."[159] "I have tried many times to persuade General Joffre to adopt a stronger and bolder line of action," he wrote, "but without avail."[160]

---

[158] Personal letter, French to Kitchener, 30 August, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/12 (reproduced in Arthur, Kitchener, III, 48.

The restoration of confidence would thus depend much on the French putting together a bona fide counter-offensive. Indeed, at the base of the problem lay the military situation on the field of battle, which, even after the successful French attack at Guise, remained very grim. The inability of French strategy to cope with the flanking movement of the German Schlieffen Plan had been glaringly revealed a second time in the unsuccessful Aisne manoeuvre. By creating great stress at the juncture of the Allied armies in the field, German strategy had destroyed Sir John's confidence in the future of the campaign. His consequent decision of August 29-30 to abandon the field and flee to safety behind the Seine brought the Allied military coalition to a state of virtual collapse. German strategy, by imposing military crisis upon crisis, thus struck at the heart of the military coalition, threatening its final destruction.

---

[159] Personal letter, French to Kitchener, 30 August, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/12; also reprinted in Arthur, Kitchener, III, 48. In his memoirs, French puts considerable emphasis on the bad condition of his army and the "special instructions" given him by Kitchener as reasons for his retirement on August 30 and makes no mention of his loss of confidence in the French Command. (French, 1914, p. 94.)

[160] Personal letter, French to Kitchener, 30 August, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/12. This paragraph was deleted from Arthur's reproduction (Arthur, Kitchener, III, 48), thus obscuring the consistent line of British argument during the "Great Retreat" that the French should be more aggressive and less supine.

. . .

In some regards, Sir John's decision at the end of August to fall out of the Allied line was analogous to that of Lord Gort on May 25, 1940, to abandon any French manoeuvre for restoring the military situation and to seek instead the safety of his Force. The failure of French strategy had in both cases focused the commanders' attention on the safety of the Force, which, as Bond has pointed out, will always assume priority in British calculation over considerations of Allied solidarity. The situation on the battlefield, however, was quite different. In 1940, Gort's position was quite hopeless, the chances of breaking through the lines of German encirclement virtually nil. His decision to evacuate therefore was justifiable.[161]

In 1914, the military situation appeared bleaker to Sir John than it really was. The defeat at Le Cateau weighed heavily on his mind and the renewed failure of French strategy destroyed his confidence in the French Command and the future of the campaign. But personal weakness--failure to impose his will on his subordinates before the Le Cateau engagement, which he had not intended, and a moody temperament giving rise to much gloom thereafter--had a significant bearing on his decision to abandon the field. Although his Force was in need of rest and refitment, it was not incapacitated. The French Armies, moreover, though thrust back, were still intact and able, as demonstrated at Guise, to hold their own in a decided engagement. There was yet, thus, some minor cause for hope.

The essential ingredient in Allied military relations, however, confidence in French leadership, had evaporated. Confidence in the

---

[161] See Bond, France and Belgium, pp. 134-36, 179.

Commander-in-Chief in a coalition, Foch declared after the successful experience of 1918, is the essential component even when command relationships are carefully spelled out.[162] In the absence of any prewar definition of command relations, British confidence in French leadership and strategy was especially essential as it formed the entire basis for cooperation. Before the Battle of Mons, unlimited confidence in the French had prompted Sir John to take a very aggressive stance. But the surly, cavalier and unsupportive conduct of Lanrezac and the repeated failures of French strategy which exposed the BEF to extreme danger and resulted only in renewed retreat had by degrees totally destroyed Sir John's confidence in the French Command.

Joffre, for his part, after the initial failure at the frontiers, had taken steps to restore British confidence. Having come to consider British participation as absolutely essential to any manoeuvre on his left flank, he prepared his strategy to a large extent around considerations of the British. His first effective measure to create a force on the British left originated in the desire to acquire greater control over the British Command. To have the British fulfil the vital role assigned to them in his Aisne plan, he visited British Headquarters twice in three days, took a tighter grip on the theatre, and launched the vigourous Guise attack on August 29 in an effort to take the pressure off his Allies. These measures, however, in the face of an inadequate overall strategy, which proved incapable of dealing with the powerful German enveloping movement of which British defeat at Le Cateau was symptomatic, were not sufficient to keep the British in the line. A serious command crisis thus developed beyond Joffre's personal means to resolve.

---

[162] Foch, Mémoires, I, 255-56.

The only real hope for renewed joint action, therefore, lay with the political leaders who might, either on their own initiative or that of one of the field commanders, intervene and restore harmony between the two Commanders-in-Chief. Would the political leaders of the moment be equal to the task and intervene in time to avert disaster? Would the British Government, in view of limited British commitment to continental defence, be prepared to force further cooperation in the field with the French? The future of Allied military relations and of the campaign in France would depend to a large extent on the answers to these questions.

CHAPTER VI

POLITICAL INTERVENTION AND THE RESTORATION OF STRATEGIC COOPERATION

AUGUST 31 - SEPTEMBER 3, 1914

That French and British forces were able to turn on the Marne on September 6, 1914, after a fortnight of retreat in the intense heat of August and launch a successful counter-offensive appeared to many contemporaries as a modern "miracle."[1] But the ~~re-~~establishment of Allied military cooperation necessary for that offensive appears in retrospect to be an even greater "miracle." A fortuitous improvement in the military situation in favour of French strategy and political intervention by both Governments to resolve the command crisis were unlikely but essential ingredients in the restoration of effective strategic cooperation. In the final analysis, the military alliance held together because the British Government, in the face of a very grave military situation, closed ranks with the French Command in order to avert disaster.

The Military Situation after Guise

Though not then entirely apparent, the Battle of Guise marked a major turning point in the military situation. Prior to the Battle, on August 27, Moltke had reaffirmed the original aims of the Schlieffen Plan: the German First Army, he affirmed, was to encircle Paris on the west while the German Second Army marched on the Capital so rapidly as to prevent the French Armies from pulling together for an effective stand.[2] But German resources were not adequate for that grandiose mission. Already, by August 29, the vast extension of German forces westward had begun to create stresses within the line as the French continued to apply their strategy of frontal assault. The attack of the French Third Army north of Verdun on August 25, followed by that of the French Fourth Army on the Meuse two days later, in effect, had caused the southward deflection of the German Third and Fourth Armies, creating a serious gap between von Bülow's Second Army and the Third Army on his left. That gap, removing all danger to Lanrezac's right, had made possible the successful French counter-attack at Guise.[3] After Guise, the German field commanders had little choice but to draw their armies closer together to eliminate the hole in their line.[4]

---

[1] See Cruttwell, The Great War, p. 31.

Had the 5½ corps, the equivalent of a very strong army, which Moltke had foolishly diverted to secondary theatres, then been available for insertion in the line, the great Schlieffen arc might have advanced unaltered and delivered a fatal blow to the French left about Paris. But French grand strategy, which called for a strong diversion by the Russians, a large diversionary attack in Lorraine and constant battering at the centre of the German line, has assured that no German forces were available for reinforcement of the German right wing. In the absence of reinforcements, the Germans were obliged to shorten their line and deflect their march southward to the ultimate advantage of the hard pressed Allies. French strategy, though giving the Germans an initial advantage, was now beginning to produce rather favourable results.

---

[2] "Orders of the German Supreme Command for August 28th," [1914], reproduced in Spears, Liaison, Appendix XXVIII, pp. 530-31; see also von Kluck, The March on Paris, pp. 75-76; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 112. This order also provided for the advance of the German Sixth Army across the Moselle between Toul and Epinal should the enemy retire. This, however, was a secondary mission to be undertaken only if conditions were favourable. (Ibid.)

[3] Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 343.

[4] See Desmazes, Joffre, p. 102; cf. Alexandre, Avec Joffre, p.153.

German shortening of the line was further accentuated by von Kluck's decision to seek the left flank of the **French Fifth** Army. Called upon by von Bülow at Guise to assist, von Kluck decided to change the direction and objective of his march even more than the need to support his neighbour required. Von Kluck assumed that the British Army, with whom he had almost lost contact, no longer posed a serious danger and that, beyond the stationary forces of the Paris fortified region, no major French force existed on his right to endanger his flank. He therefore decided, with Moltke's belated approval, to seek the left flank of the Fifth Army by marching rapidly to the southeast of Paris, rather than around to the west of the city. The investment of Paris, for which he deemed the German right wing too weak in any case, was thus abandoned in favour of an operational objective, destruction of the Fifth Army, which he hoped would lead to final victory.[5] For a while, that change of objective would greatly accentuate Anglo-French differences by driving a further wedge between their forces; ultimately, however, it would give French strategy the advantage which it needed, allowing the French to work out an effective counter-offensive with the British. Without a more favourable situation on the field of battle, it is doubtful if effective cooperation could have been renewed.

The German offensive, in fact, had begun to suffer from over-extension, having reached that point at which in Clausewitzian theory the advantages of the defensive outweigh those of the offensive. The great length of German supply lines diverted men and materials from duty at the front and some delays were experienced in ammunition deliveries.[6] One corps left behind at Maubeuge to invest the fortress and two others left before Antwerp to contain the Belgians seriously weakened the German right at the decisive moment.[7] More serious was the breakdown of adequate intelligence information as the German advance penetrated deep into enemy territory. British and French units on the far Allied left, for example, decidedly were not the insignificant and immobile forces von Kluck supposed. Even worse was von Kluck's failure to foresee that political pressure would probably oblige significant forces to be assembled for the defence of Paris on his right. Only a military technician unaware of political realities could have made that error. Thus, in hot pursuit of the flank of the Fifth Army, he abandoned all caution and, disobeying orders, plunged his forces headlong into the French noose.[8] There was indeed some substance to Joffre's dry remark of October 1914 that "It is not I who won the battle of the Marne, but Kluck who lost it."[9]

---

[5] See von Kluck, The March on Paris, pp. 75-76, 78-79, 80-84, 90-91; Spears, Liaison, pp. 260-62; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 174, 343; Desmazes, Joffre, pp. 102-03.

As the Germans penetrated deeply into France, French intelligence became much better. Information was now received from French citizens behind the lines who either transmitted messages via neutral countries or sent them via carrier pigeons dropped from French aircraft.[10] British aerial reconnaissance, moreover, was beginning to prove its worth. Although the service had been very good and provided valuable information from the beginning of the campaign, it was some time before the British Command placed sufficient confidence in information received from this technologically innovative source.[11] The value of British aerial reconnaissance to the Allies was fully demonstrated when it was the first to detect that von Kluck's line of march had swung southward across the Oise on August 31.[12]

---

[6] Spears, Liaison, p. 261; cf. von Kluck, The March on Paris, pp. 81, 84.

[7] Alexandre, Avec Joffre, pp. 152-53.

[8] See Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 175; cf. von Kluck, The March on Paris, pp. 94-99. German communications were very bad given the difficulty of maintaining telephone lines and the inadequacy of wireless communications. (Ibid., p. 98.)

[9] Desmazes, Joffre, p. 103. That observation was made to Jules Cambon, the former Ambassador to Berlin.

Another important breakthrough on the part of French intelligence was the cracking of the German wireless cipher code. Wireless being the chief means of communication between the German High Command and their armies in the field, the French, in consequence, were able to establish very accurate enemy battle orders.[13] "Information captured from the German wireless, since we know their cipher," wrote Berthelot on August 31, "is most interesting and helps us see clearly into their game, or at least to know their movements."[14] Already on August 26, for example, the first date on which information had been obtained from German radio messages, Joffre learned that the British were assailed at Le Cateau by no less than four German corps.[15] Information obtained by the same means a few days later indicated that forces from von Bülow's Army had been withdrawn for the investment of Maubeuge and further convinced Joffre that his Guise counter-offensive was both "necessary and possible."[16] Information from the German wireless after August 31, moreover, helped the French avert disaster on the hard pressed left flank of the Fifth Army and knowledge thus obtained was a major contributing factor in preparing the later Allied victory on the Marne.[17] The "fog of war," which had had such devastating effect on early French manoeuvres, had now lifted from the Allies and settled on their enemies, with equally disastrous consequences.

---

[10] Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 139; Spears, Liaison, p. 213.

[11] See above, p..172. Cf. Spears, Liaison, p. 138.

[12] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 31, 1914, p. 75.

[13] The supposed German battle order on August 31 was almost exactly what it actually was. (Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 31, pp. 75-76 and n. 1, p. 76.) Lanrezac indicates that quite accurate knowledge of the German disposition was had before the Battle of Guise. (Lanrezac, Plan de campagne, pp. 212-13.)

[14] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 31, 1914, p. 76.

The French, like the Germans, however, also had difficulty with the pulling apart of their line by the outward extension of their left wing, but they had the advantage of interior lines. A gap having developed between the Fourth and Fifth Armies, Joffre resolved the problem by the creation on August 29 of a special army detachment under Foch to plug the hole. That force, consisting of two active corps, a reserve division, and a cavalry division drawn from the left of the Fourth Army, was strengthened by two divisions transported by rail from each of the Second and Third Armies.[18] The use of the railway and the availability of forces for reinforcements were thus significant factors in improving the French position all along the line, just as they were of decisive importance in amassing forces about Paris for the final blow on the German flank. Although the Fifth Army would be seriously threatened for some time to come by von Kluck's advance, the tide had in fact begun to turn in favour of the Allies after the successful French counterstroke at Guise on August 29.

---

[15] See AFGG, I(II), Map #7, "Movement of the British Army, August 26, 1914, and location of the Vth Army at nightfall"; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 319.

[16] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 325; cf. Lanrezac, Plan de campagne, pp. 212-13.

[17] See Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 31, p. 76 and succeeding entries which demonstrate this observation.

[18] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 331-32, 335-38; Berthelot, Diary, I, en-

Groping for a New Plan at GQG
August 28 - September 1, 1914

As their Aisne manoeuvre began to crumble after August 28, the French Command groped blindly for a new field strategy for several days. French strategy in consequence went through a number of editions in rapid succession and the British were given new instructions, as each new plan was being considered. The demands made on the British were thus subject to daily change, giving the impression of incoherence and inconsistency in French planning, which further exacerbated inter-Allied relations.

The immediate response of the French Command to the approaching failure of the Aisne plan was to prepare to defend Paris integrally. On the evening of August 28-29, withdrawal of the three French Armies on the left wing to the Seine on either side of Paris was envisaged, leaving only the Third Army to cover the enormous gap between the Seine and Meuse.[19] However, the grave danger under the plan of French forces being separated because of a weakened centre was all too apparent, and the plan

---

try of 28, 29 August, 1914, pp. 68-70. AFGG, I(II), Map #12, "Location of the IVth and Vth Armies and the British Army, 29 August, 1914, at nightfall"; AFGG, X(I), 466-67; AFGG, X(II), 342, 362, 180, 146. (Tome X of AFGG is subtitled Ordre de bataille des grandes unites.)

[19] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 338; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of 29 August, 1914, pp. 69, 71.

was soon abandoned without ever being presented to the British. The British nevertheless were informed on August 30 of the French decision for renewed retreat.[20] But no new plan was outlined, for nothing definitive had in fact been decided except that further retreat was essential and that decisive engagements should be avoided in order to "hold on the longest possible."[21] That communication, as observed, entirely destroyed Sir John's confidence in the French Command and was a major factor in his renewed determination "to retreat in four or five marches" to the lower Seine west of Paris.[22]

By the time Sir John's plan to retreat behind the Seine reached Joffre on August 30, a new French strategy had evolved at GQG which was more congenial to such a lengthy withdrawal. Under the warm advocacy of Berthelot, a new plan was devised on August 30 which, like the Ardennes plan, called for a frontal assault on the enemy centre once the French Armies had withdrawn to safety behind the Seine. As no one at French Headquarters believed that the French left could be reinforced quickly enough to forestall the German march on Paris, the French Command was prepared to abandon the Capital, if need be, in the hope of winning a victory in the field.[23] The marked preference of the French

---

[20] See Joffre, Mémoires, I, 345-49; cf. Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 30, p. 71.

[21] #2838, Tel. message, [GQG to] Huguet, 30 August, [1914], 8:45 a.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1401; Huguet's note to GQG, 30 August, [1914], AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1424. This minute may not have been dispatched, but contains valuable information on events at British Headquarters. Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 30, 1914, p. 72.

[22] CT #112. Huguet to GQG, 30/8/14, 3:00 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1422.

[23] See Joffre, Mémoires, I, 229-31, 338, 346; Pont's "Mémoire," 30 August, 1914, reproduced in Ibid., pp. 346-49; cf. Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 29, 1914, p. 71.

Command for concentration of forces and manoeuvre in the field over positional warfare was thus starkly revealed.

The French Government, however, was not prepared to give up the Capital without a fight. Three days earlier Joffre had indicated to Millerand that Paris might have to be sacrificed.[24] The Government strongly objected, refusing to accept the purely military view of the High Command, and on August 29 and 30 insisted that Paris be defended with active corps as earlier demanded.[25] His own position having been seriously undermined by the continuous retreat of his armies,[26] Joffre was in no position to resist Government advice, and as a result, on August 30, asked the Fifth Army, which had been designated for the defence of Paris under his earlier plan, to send an active corps to the Capital.[27] That, however, was more of a gesture than a definite move to defend the city systematically, as only that corps and the Sixth Army had been assigned to its defence.[28]

The new Seine plan, moreover, did not envisage a flank attack on the German right, as the French Command was still unaware of the southward deflection of von Kluck's march. Rather, the French Third, Fourth and Fifth Armies would attack the German centre as the German armies moved to invest Paris. As in earlier plans, the French thus hoped to smash the German centre weakened by an over-extension of their line.[29]

---

[24] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 329-31; see Desmazes, Joffre, p. 98.

[25] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 29, 31, 1914, pp. 70, 74; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 313-15, 331, 338; AFGG, I(II), 518. Spears, Liaison, p. 286 and n. 1, p. 286.

[26] Henry Contamine, La victoire de la Marne; 9 septembre, 1914 (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), pp. 248-50.

[27] CT #2971, [GQG to] Vth Army, 30 August, [1914], before 10:30 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1416; AFGG, I(II), 518; Spears, Liaison, p. 286 and n. 1, p. 286.

[28] "These forces moreover will be very weak for the defence of Paris," wrote Poincaré on September 1, 1914. (Poincaré Papers, XXXVII, BN, NAF (16028), "Notes Journalières," entry of September 1, 1914.

Militarily, this plan was not without merit, for the fortified region of Paris, in the event of a German attack, could probably have been held for some days and the extension of the German line would undoubtedly have created weaknesses which could have been exploited. All depended on the strength of the German right which, of course, had been seriously weakened.[30] In defence of the French Command, moreover, it must be pointed out that the Seine manoeuvre was not definitively accepted until September 1,[31] by which time it was clear that von Kluck would bypass Paris to the east in his vigourous search for the left flank of the Fifth Army. That deflection of his line of march allowed the French High Command to return to the earlier conception of an attack on the outer German flank, for which French deployment was entirely favourable. Good luck was indeed on the side of the Allies.

As originally conceived, the Seine plan assigned no essential role to the British. Apprised of the British desire to retreat to the lower Seine, Pont, in elaborating the plan, merely called for the British to retreat to the east rather than the west of Paris in order to avoid crossing the supply lines of the Sixth Army. The British would then circle Paris to the south and reappear on the lower Seine on the left of the Sixth Army.[32] The British were thus asked to readjust their retreat to the east of Paris, but no information on the overall French plan was communicated.[33] And, to make matters worse, French approval for British retreat to the Seine was almost immediately withdrawn, for a new French plan of attack was briefly elaborated on August 31 which required immediate and unstinted British support. To the crisis in command was thus added continued inconsistency and want of sustained direction on the part of the French to further aggravate an already tenuous relationship with the British.

---

[29] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 346-49 (citing Pont's "Mémoire," 30 August, 1914, which Joffre indicates served as the basis for the new manoeuvre.) Cf. Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 140, who wrongly asserts that the inflection of the British retreat southward made it necessary for the Fifth Army to retreat to the Marne rather than to Paris. A gap of 30 or more kilometres remained between the two armies after August 30. (See AFGG, I(II), Maps #56-58, 60-64.)

[30] Cf. Lanrezac, Plan de campagne, p. 263, who asserts that the Germans might have successfully invested Paris had they organized their centre defensively on the Marne. That, however, was unlikely, as neither side yet appreciated the full strength of the defensive.

[31] #3205, "General Instruction no. 4" [to Vth, IVth, IIIrd Armies], Sept. 1, [1914], 2:00 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1792.

Political Intervention, August 31 - September 1, 1914

The interim French plan of August 31, which was to set in motion a train of political events of decisive importance in Allied military relations, had its origins in the immediate military situation. Militarily, August 30 had been uneventful, for von Bülow, after the engagement at Guise, had ordered his troops to take 36 hours rest, thus providing a most welcome easing of pressure on the Allies.[34] The French Fifth Army, although experiencing difficulty on its left, retired slowly in front of the Serre, and the British, as a result of their earlier decision to stand, fell back but a half day's march from the Oise, their right partially behind and to the rear of the Fifth Army.[35] The next day, the whole face of the campaign took on a changed aspect to Joffre, whose optimism was without bounds. Word that thirty-two trains of German troops (two corps) were moving from the western front to the east convinced him that Allied grand strategy of war on two fronts against Germany was indeed beginning to work, despite news of the great German victory over the Russians at Tannenberg. An intercepted radio message revealed, moreover, that the Germans considered their engagement at Guise a considerable defeat.[36] Joffre therefore examined at once the possibility of an immediate counter-attack. If an advance were made in Lorraine; if the Fourth Army were to attack at once as it desired; if, in conjunction with the Third Army, Lanrezac were to exploit his success of the day before; and if the British and Sixth Armies were to stand firm, the chances appeared good, he told Poincaré, that the German advance could now be halted.[37]

---

[32] Pont's "Mémoire," August 30, 1914, in Joffre, Mémoires, I, 346-49; Tel. message #2962, Commander-in-Chief to Huguet, 30 August, [1914], 9:45 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1414.

[33] Tel. message #2962, Commander-in-Chief to Huguet, 30 August, [1914], 9:45 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1414; cf. Poincaré Papers, XXXVI, BN, NAF (16027), "Notes Journalières," entry of August 30, 1914; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 349.

[34] Spears, Liaison, pp. 273-74; French, 1914, p. 91; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 30, 1914.

The plan, however, was only partially implemented. Before making definitive plans, Joffre deemed it necessary to ascertain the condition of Foch's Army Detachment in the vital gap between the French Fourth and

---

[35] AFGG, I(II), Map #13, "Location of the Vth and VIth Armies and the British Army, August 30, 1914, at nightfall"; see Spears, Liaison, pp. 284-85.

[36] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 352-53, 365-66; Tel. message #3003, [GQG to] Huguet, 31 August, [1914], 8:20 a.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1602 and n. 1, p. 153.

[37] Poincaré, Au service, V, entry 31 August, 1914, p. 219; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 31, 1914, p. 73. Joffre, in his Mémoires, makes no mention of this short-lived plan or of his consequent appeal to Poincaré. Disclosure of the obvious jerkiness and inconsistency of French planning would not have enhanced the French Command's reputation.

Fifth Armies.[38] This plan in fact was finally killed by an unfavourable report from Foch on the condition of his force and by Belin's argument that it was in French interest to hold on before attacking until the Russian effort could be felt more fully.[39] In the meantime, nonetheless, Joffre ordered his Fifth and Sixth Armies to give up as little terrain as possible.[40] To the British he issued a most urgent demand (despite his approval of a lengthy retreat the night before) that they maintain their position between the Fifth and Sixth Armies, give up ground only if the adjacent French Armies did, and refrain from giving the impression of hasty retreat.[41] Huguet's interpretation of this demand was to insist most vigourously that Sir John march forward the next day, on September 1.[42]

Joffre, however, recognized that his chances of personally obtaining British support were now very slight. Neither the French attack at Guise, nor persistent and pressing messages through the liaison officers, nor his repeated personal visits had succeeded in slowing Sir John's rapid retreat after the Battle of Le Cateau. The crisis in command relations having come to a head the day previous with Sir John's decision to drop out of the line, Joffre once again appealed to the politicians in order to obtain British cooperation with his plan. But this time Joffre turned to Poincaré, the French President, whose authority he respected and with whom he was prone to deal directly in contravention of the constitutional responsibility of ministers.[43] As later on, Joffre showed a shrewd tendency to approach individuals with actual power and be able to get results, regardless of their title.[44] The command crisis thus reached a distinctively new stage, for Joffre, by appealing to Poincaré for support in dealing with the British Command, raised the crisis to the level of an issue in Entente political relations. The ball was now in the politicians' court.

---

[38] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 31, 1914, p. 73.

[39] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 366-67.

[40] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 31, 1914, p. 73; see Joffre, Mémoires, I, 353.

[41] Tel. message #3003, [GQG to] Huguet, 31 August, [1914], 8:20 a.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1602, n. 1, p. 153; cf. Joffre, Mémoires, I, 353; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 31, 1914, p. 73.

[42] CT 120, Huguet to GQG, 31 August, 1914, 12:00 noon, AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1628.

Poincaré initially had little success in obtaining British cooperation. Advised by Colonel Penelon, liaison officer between GQG and the President of the Republic, "that if the English were to agree not to continue their retreat and to contain the Germans on their front, the chances of success are much greater than the chances of defeat,"[45] Poincaré at once sent for Sir Francis Bertie, the British Ambassador, to whom he "explained the situation." Bertie in turn telephoned Marshal French and returned about 10:00 p.m. with Sir John's personal secretary who brought a note from Sir John.[46] In his note, Sir John again reaffirmed his inability to stand for at least a week because of his loss of men and materials. The most he was prepared to concede was not to withdraw beyond a line east and west through Nanteuil, provided the French armies on either side maintained their actual positions. He would then keep his forces at the disposal of the French, but his own freedom of action must be maintained, he said. No word had reached him, in any case, that the French Army planned to take up the offensive, he added, alluding to the inadequacy of French strategic direction and their lack of communication with him.[47]

---

[43] Cf. Wright, Poincaré, pp. 190-91.

[44] See below. Poincaré's apparent objection to this unconstitutional practice (see Ibid.) was not sufficient to curtail it.

[45] Poincaré Papers, XXXVI, BN, NAF (16027), "Notes Journalières," entry of August 31, 1914; cf. Poincaré, Au service, V, entry of August 31, 1914, pp. 219, 221-22.

[46] Poincaré Papers, XXXVI, BN, NAF (16027), "Notes Journalières," entry of August 31, 1914; cf. Poincaré, Au service, V, entry of August 31, 1914, pp. 219, 221-22.

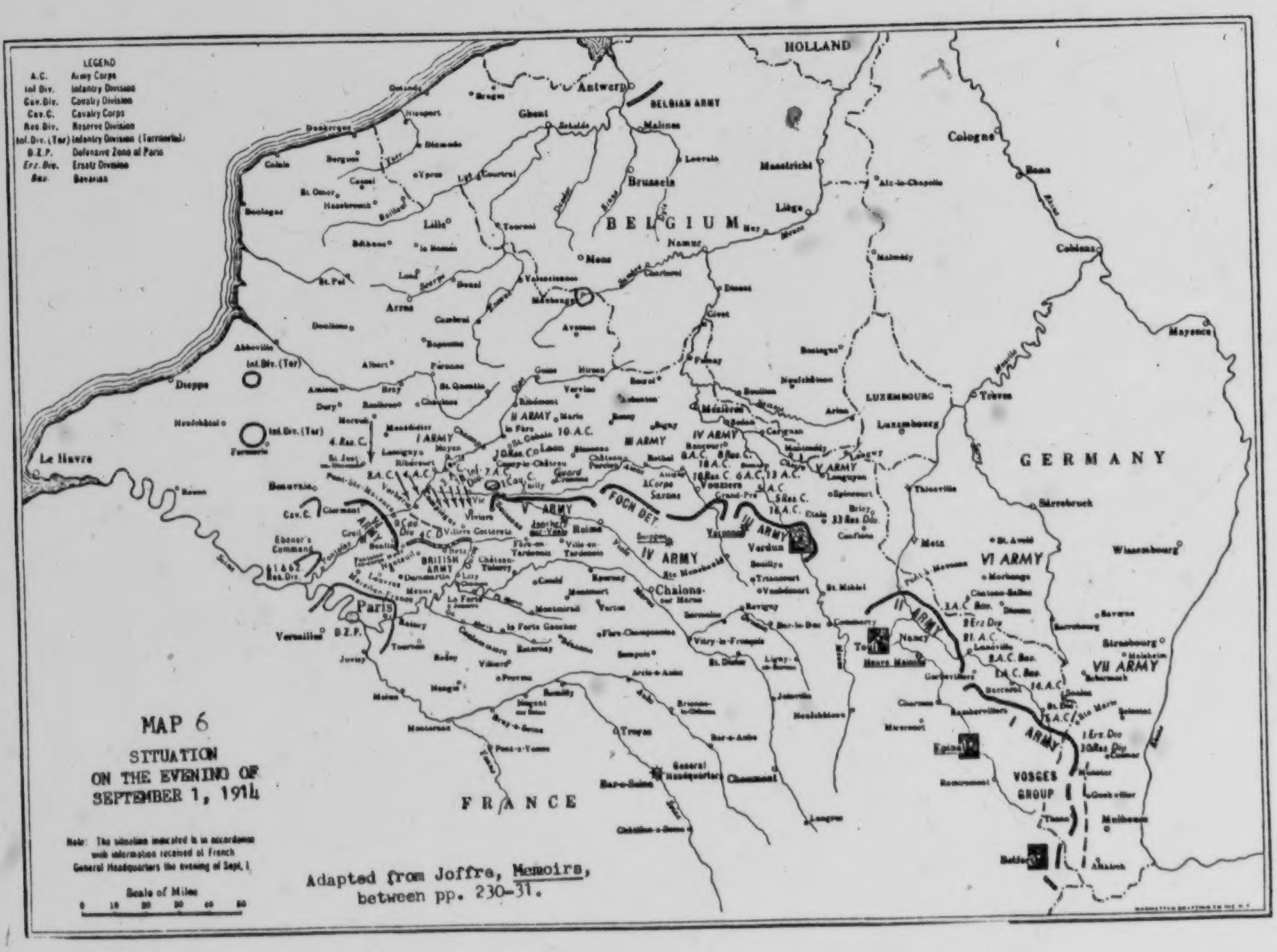
Sir John's offer, as Poincaré fully recognized, was really a polite refusal to further engage, for his retirement to the Nanteuil line would place him a long day's march to the rear of the Sixth Army on his left and at least two days' march to the rear of the Fifth Army on his right, whose position was considerably forward in the French line.[48] "Sir John seems determined to stay one day's march in rear of the French," wrote Wilson. "This is a ridiculous position," he continued, "for it is neither one thing nor the other & it makes 2 front flanks ragged & insecure. It annoys the French very much and rightly."[49] But Sir John,

---

[47] Quoted in Poincaré, *Au service*, V, entry of August 31, 1914, pp. 221-22; cf. British HQ to *GQG*, received 31 August, [1914], at 5:00 p.m., *AFGG*, I(II) A(II), no. 1632 and n. 1, p. 168; Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 353-54.

[48] Poincaré Papers, XXXVI, *BN*, NAF (16027), "Notes Journalières," entry of August 31, 1914; cf. Poincaré, *Au service*, V, entry of August 31, 1914, p. 222; see *AFGG*, I(II), Maps #14, 15, 56, respectively "Location of the 5th and 6th Armies and the British Army at nightfall, 31 August, 1914," "Location of the 5th and 6th Armies and the British Army at nightfall on September 1, 1914," "Overall situation of French Armies, 31 August, 1914, at nightfall." During the night of August 31-September 1 and on the day of September 1, the Fifth Army executed an enormous march to the rear, placing it at that point only one day's march ahead of the Nanteuil line which the British Army had not yet quite attained. (See *Ibid.*, Maps #56, 14.) See Map 6, p. 247.

[49] Wilson Diaries, V, *IWM*, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 31, 1914; see Huguet, *Britain and the War*, p. 69 and Lanrezac, *Plan de campagne*, p. 249, who claims the British kept not one but two days' march to the rear of the Fifth Army. This is of course an exaggeration of the general situation. (See *AFGG*, I(II), Maps #6-15, 57-64.)


LEGEND
A.C. Army Corps
Inf.Div. Infantry Division
Cav.Div. Cavalry Division
Cav.C. Cavalry Corps
Res.Div. Reserve Division
Inf.Div.(Ter) Infantry Division (Territorial)
D.Z.P. Defensive Zone of Paris
Erz.Div. Ersatz Division
Bav. Bavarian
HOLLAND
BELGIUM
GERMANY
FRANCE
LUXEMBOURG
BELGIAN ARMY
BRITISH ARMY
I ARMY
II ARMY
III ARMY
IV ARMY
V ARMY
VI ARMY
VII ARMY
FOCH DET.
VOSGES GROUP
Antwerp
Brussels
Paris
Verdun
Reims
Chalons-sur-Marne
Nancy
Metz
Strasbourg
Cologne
Coblenz
Mayence
Le Havre
General Headquarters
Scale of Miles
0
10
20
30
40
50

MAP 6

SITUATION
ON THE EVENING OF
SEPTEMBER 1, 1914

Note: The situation indicated is in accordance with information received at French General Headquarters the evening of Sept. 1

Adapted from Joffre, Memoirs,
between pp. 230-31.

completely distrustful of the French and fearing for his exposed flanks in the case of renewed French retreat, was keenly anxious to avoid an engagement without French support,[50] although he was hard pressed on August 31 not only by Joffre but his own Government that he "stand and fight."[51]

Poincaré's intervention nonetheless had greater impact than was immediately obvious, for official French wishes had been expressed by the French President, and the British Government, once Bertie gave an account of Poincaré's actions to Grey in London, became directly involved in the issue.[52] The political alliance would thus be put to the test.

From the beginning of the campaign, supervision by the British Cabinet of operations in France had been close and continuous.[53] Repeated demands were made by Kitchener on behalf of the Cabinet for full information from the front on Allied dispositions and intended movements.[54] In almost daily Cabinet meetings, from August 24-31, the chief topic of Cabinet discussion was the military situation as disclosed in

---

[50] Clive Diaries, II/I, KCMA, entry of September 1, 1914.

[51] French, 1914, p. 195; British HQ to GQG, received 31 August, 1914, at 5:00 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1632 and n. 1, p. 168.

[52] See personal letter, Grey to Kitchener, August 31, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/77 WU/13.

[53] On the relationship between Kitchener and the Cabinet, see Guinn, British Strategy and Politics, 1914-1918, pp. 31-35. The ancient fear of overconcentration of power made the Commander-in-Chief officially responsible to the Cabinet rather than the Secretary of State for War.

[54] See "Instruction to Sir John French from Lord Kitchener, August, 1914," HGW (1914), I, Appendix 8, pp. 499-500; Personal letter, Asquith to the King, 26 August, 1914, PRO, Cab 41/35/36; T M.O. 5, no. 12, Kitchener to Military Attaché, British Embassy, Paris, 26 August, [1914], Grey Papers, PRO, FO/800/55, pp. 193-94; Doumerque memorandum on conversation with Sir Francis Bertie, 26 August, 1914, AE, Série

Sir John's telegrams.[55] Some of Sir John's disillusionment with the French may even have stemmed from official inspiration. A telegram from Kitchener on behalf of the Cabinet (to the British Military Attaché at Paris) on August 26, for example, made the observation that the French Armies "seem to be unable to hold the Germans or stop the offensive." The same telegram announced the dispatch of 3,000 troops to Ostend, indicative of the ongoing debate in Cabinet between the "blue water" school and the interventionists, and suggesting that not everyone in the Cabinet was agreed on the efficacy of the campaign in France.[56]

Generally, though, the Cabinet was responsive to the demands of its Commander-in-Chief. Immediately upon Sir John's request, ten per cent replacement to cover losses was sanctioned on August 24.[57] On August 28, Sir John's request for further reinforcements led to the dispatch of two infantry and one cavalry division from India directly to France, and the recall of regulars from Egypt, Gibraltar and Malta for the formation of new units for France. At the same time, however, Kit-

---

"Guerre, 1914-1918," vol. 534, p. 69; CT, Bertie to Grey, 27 August, 1914, T., Grey to Bertie, 27 August, 1914, Grey Papers, PRO, 800/55, pp. 202, 204; Arthur, Kitchener, III, 38.

[55] See personal letters, Asquith to the King, August 24, 26, 29, 31, and September 1, 1914, PRO, Cab 41/35/35-39.

[56] T MO 5 no. 12, Kitchener to Military Attaché, British Embassy, Paris, August 26, [1914], Grey Papers, PRO, FO/800/55, pp. 193-94; cf. personal letter, Asquith to the King, 26 August, 1914, PRO, Cab 41/35/36.

Much yet remains to be said on the relationship between the British Command and the home authorities. Despite the very liberal policy of the present British Government on the general opening of archives, a thirty-year rule applying generally, the file dealing with communications between the High Command and the War Office (PRO, WO/158), has been closed for one hundred years from its date of origin, suggesting that all the secrets have not yet been divulged.

[57] Personal letter, Asquith to the King, 24 August, 1914, PRO, Cab 41/35/35.

chener obtained approval for the recruitment of another 500,000 men for his New Armies, which was at odds with the field strategy of immediate victory in France.[58] Although ultimately the salvation of the Allies, the creation of new armies by Kitchener was distasteful to both the British and French Commands, for it made drains on the forces and officers immediately available to them.

Because of their close scrutiny of operations, the Cabinet was apprised much in advance of the brewing conflict between the two commands. Already on August 30, Kitchener, made aware of Sir John's decision to abandon the French line by Robb, had asked Sir John for an explanation. Sir John's pessimistic reply sent off late on August 30 announced his intention of leaving the French line and retreating to the Seine. This brought forth a sharp rejoinder from the special Cabinet meeting called on August 31 to consider the matter. "After the Cabinet had carefully considered the matter," Asquith reported to the King, "a further telegram to Sir J. French was drafted expressing the anxiety of the Government, and dwelling upon the importance of his cooperating closely & continuously with General Joffre."[59]

Thus, by the time Poincaré intervened on Joffre's behalf, the British Government had already begun to exert great pressure on Sir John to cooperate more fully with the French.[60] The telegram from Kitchener to French affirmed that the Cabinet "expect that you will, as far as possible, conform to the plans of General Joffre, for the conduct of the campaign."[61] This telegram, Joffre's urgent demand, and Poincaré's intervention, Sir John chose to ignore. His only concession to the French, as shown, was to offer to hold the Nanteuil line far to the rear of both the Sixth and Fifth Armies, providing neither of the French armies on his flanks retreated from their current positions.

---

[58] Personal letter, Asquith to the King, 29 August, 1914, PRO, Cab 41/35/37; cf. Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of August 28, 1914, p. 69.

[59] Personal letter, Asquith to the King, August 31, 1914, PRO, Cab 41/35/38. See T F54, French to Kitchener, 31 August, 1914 [written August 30, 1914], CT 767, 772, Kitchener to French, 31 August, 1914, HGW (1914), (2nd ed.), I, Appendix 22 (5-7), pp. 474-75; cf. Arthur, Kitchener, III, 46-47, 51-52.

[60] French, 1914, p. 195; British HQ to GQG, received 31 August, 1914, at 5:00 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1632 and n. 1, p. 168.

Such was the state of affairs when word was received in London in the evening of August 31 of Poincaré's intervention in the crisis. Not everyone in the Cabinet was agreed that Sir John was at fault or that he had not satisfied Poincaré's demands. Notable among the dissenters was Sir Edward Grey, one of the most powerful members of the Cabinet, who, as a long term supporter of the concept of a limited commitment to war on land, defended Sir John's position adamantly. "French's offer to wait in the Nanteuil line seems a fair way of meeting the President's message," he wrote to Kitchener. That Sir John should have been asked by Joffre the day before to hold the line slightly north of Compiègne-Soissons while the Sixth Army fell back to the Clermont-Compiègne line "was monstrous with French's force in its present state," he said. "Under all circumstances I think French should be allowed to retire before other forces do." At the same time, he expressed grave doubt that Joffre really intended to hold the line at all, as the evacuation of Paris was imminent.[62]

Kitchener, fortunately for the future of the campaign, was not convinced by Grey's skilful argument. So far as he was aware, adequate reinforcements had been sent to make good Sir John's losses. Why could he not then comply with French movements? Not only the outcome of the campaign but the future of the continent were at stake. As Sir John had not attempted to comply with Cabinet directives, a stronger measure might be required.[63] That conviction was further fortified by a most unsatisfactory telegram received from Sir John at midnight on the 31st, further explaining his decision to withdraw and bitterly incriminating the French. "If the French go on with their present tactics, which are practically to fall back right and left of me, usually without notice, and to abandon all idea of offensive operations," he wired, "of course then the gap in the French line will remain and the consequences must be borne by them." As the French are unwilling to avail themselves of the opportunity for offensive action in order to close their flanks, he complained, "I do not see why I should be called upon again to run the risk of absolute disaster in order a second time to save them." These observations seemed to confirm that the crisis was largely one of command relations, although Sir John added his usual caveat. "I do not think that you understand the shattered condition of the Second Army Corps and how it paralyses my power of offense," he told the War Secretary.[64]

---

[61] CT #772, Kitchener to French, 31 August, 1914, HGW (1914), (2nd ed.), I, Appendix 22, pp. 475-76.

[62] Personal letter, Grey to Kitchener, August 31, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/77 WU/13; cf. T F54, French to Kitchener, 30 August, 1914, HGW (1914) (2nd ed.), I, Appendix 22 (5), pp. 474-75.

Kitchener moved rapidly to resolve the crisis. He immediately arranged a late night consultation with Asquith, Churchill, R. McKenna, Home Secretary, Jack Pease, President of the Board of Education, and later Lloyd George, but Grey, who favoured Sir John's point of view, was deliberately allowed to sleep until after a decision had been reached.[65] Kitchener impressed upon those present the potentially disastrous consequences of Sir John's abandonment of the French. "In consequence of the unsatisfactory nature of Sir J. French's latest telegrams," Asquith reported to the King the next morning, "and the vital importance of avoiding at this moment a false move at the front, it was determined that Lord Kitchener should himself go over & confer with Sir J. French." "We came to the decided conclusion," Asquith wrote his young friend, Venetia Stanley, "that the only thing to be done was for Kitchener to go there without delay, and unravel the situation, and if necessary put the fear of God into them all."[66] "Lord Kitchener accordingly left at 1 a.m. via Dover [for Le] Havre & Paris" where he was expected to arrive soon after noon.[67]

---

[63] Arthur, Kitchener, III, 45 and n. 1, p. 45; cf. personal letter, Asquith to the King, 24 August, 1914, PRO, Cab 41/35/35; French, 1914, p. 95; Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 277-78; Cassar, Kitchener, pp. 236-37.

[64] T F60, French to Kitchener, 31 August, 1914, HGW (1914) (2nd ed.), I, Appendix 22(8), p. 478, also reprinted in Arthur, Kitchener, III, 52-53.

The purpose of that visit was made entirely clear to Sir John. "Has a message from the President of the French Republic about leaving the line reached you yet?" wired Kitchener to Sir John before leaving. "The result of this may be serious to the French Army, and we feel that you should call upon your troops for an effort. I am coming to see you this morning to talk over the situation, as I find it very difficult to judge."[68]

---

[65] Personal letter, Asquith to the King, September 1, 1914, PRO, Cab 41/35/39; Asquith, Memories and Reflections, II, 36-37. Kitchener awoke Grey only after the meeting at 1:30 a.m. to tell him that a Destroyer had been ordered for Kitchener's crossing of the Channel. (Arthur, Kitchener, III, 54.)

[66] Personal letter, Asquith to the King, September 1, 1914, PRO, Cab 41/35/39; cf. Letter, Churchill to Sir John French, September 4, 1914, quoted in Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 278. Letter, Asquith to Venetia Stanley, 1 September 1914, quoted in Cassar, Kitchener, p. 237.

[67] Personal letter, Asquith to the King, September 1, 1914, PRO, Cab 41/35/39; cf. Cassar, Kitchener, p. 237.

Thus was instigated Kitchener's famous visit to Paris of September 1, which forced Sir John to stand and fight alongside the French. That anyone other than a professional soldier with a great deal of personal authority could have reacted so decisively under the circumstances is very doubtful. It was indeed fortuitous for the British that Kitchener happened to be in London on leave when war broke out in August, 1914.

In a sense, the British Government acted independently of either Joffre or the French Government, for strong measures had already been taken by the Cabinet to obtain greater cooperation from Sir John, but without result. It was Sir John's unobliging telegram received very late on August 31 which moved members of the Cabinet to take more dramatic action and sparked Kitchener's personal visit, rather than Poincaré's direct appeal to Sir John, which had little effect except to raise officially a problem already under serious consideration by the British Government. The response of the British Government, which acted largely on its own, thus went far beyond what Joffre had expected in his appeal to Poincaré for support.

The British Cabinet, nevertheless, had not been unanimous. Had Grey's views prevailed, there might have been no Battle of the Marne; certainly no British participation in it, for Sir John, as will be shown, marched reluctantly even under the pressure of his superiors.

---

[68] CT 782, Kitchener to French, 1 September, 1914, HGW (1914) (2nd ed.), I, Appendix 22 (10), 477. Arthur cites this telegram but does not mention Poincaré's intervention, Grey's resistance, or the late meeting which gave Kitchener permission to consult with French. His explanation that Kitchener alone moved to solve the crisis is something of a distortion. (See Arthur, Kitchener, III, 50-54.)

Kitchener nevertheless carried the day against his reluctant Cabinet colleague, with the result that he would play a major role in the great reversal of Allied military fortunes on the Marne. If the political Entente proved to be very much alive and functioning at its best, it was largely due to the energetic personality of Kitchener, who, more than the others, saw the dire necessity of supporting the French in time of great difficulty in order to avert a final military disaster.

Meanwhile, as the result of events on the field of battle, Joffre lodged even further grievances with his Government against Sir John. Indeed, the forward movement of von Kluck's Army in quest of the left flank of the Fifth Army, which began in earnest on August 31, raised anew and in even more acute form the question of the British mission on Lanrezac's left wing. Although von Kluck's new strategy would prove the ultimate salvation of the Allies, it seriously threatened the left of the Fifth Army, and Sir John, anxious to avoid further engagement, was intent upon eluding the German advance. Lanrezac and the French Command, on the other hand, felt that he should stand to parry the danger to Lanrezac's exposed left flank.[69]

As a result of these differing points of view, an incident developed on August 31 which led to further French recrimination against Sir John. A portion of Sir John's force having drifted behind Lanrezac's left during the Guise engagement, Joffre invited the British to fall back in a southwesterly direction to free Lanrezac's rear while maintaining close liaison with that Army, but the British fell back farther on August 31 than Joffre anticipated, creating a wide and dangerous gap in the line which was immediately exploited by German cavalry.[70]

---

[69] Tel. message #2838, [GQG to] Huguet, 30 August, 1914, 8:45 a.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1401; Lanrezac, Plan de campagne, pp. 250-51; Tel. message #3055, Commander-in-Chief to Huguet, 31 August, [1914], 12:00 noon, AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1609.

"During the day yesterday," Joffre complained to Millerand on September 1, "the accentuated withdrawal of the English Armies laid open the left flank of the 5th Army, and, as a result, a German Cavalry Corps was able to advance to Soissons, rendering impossible the transfer that I had ordered of the 18th Corps to Paris."[71] Another Corps (the IV), Joffre promised, would nonetheless be drawn from the Third Army north of Verdun for the defence of the Capital.[72]

Although the British had become the necessary scapegoat of the French Command in explaining to the French Government the failure of the Aisne manoeuvre and their subsequent difficulties,[73] there was in this instance some justification for Joffre's complaints. The British, under German pressure, not only failed on August 31 to blow up the Bailly Bridge on the Oise over which German cavalry streamed,[74] but also refused to deploy their right against the cavalry advance because of general orders for retreat behind the Aisne.[75] As a result, Lanrezac, with German forces to the rear of his left wing, had to extricate himself by marching his left to the east of Soissons and to the rear around the danger, further pulling his left wing away from the British and creating an even wider breach in the Allied line.[76]

---

[70] Tel. message #2838, [GQG to] Huguet, 30 August, [1914], 8:45 a.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1401; "Location of the Vth and VIth Armies and the British Armies at nightfall, August 30, 1914," AFGG, I(II), Maps #13, 14.

[71] CT #3173, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, September 1, 1914, AG, 16N1905, file: Comptes rendus au Ministre du 29 août 1914 au 14 octobre 1914 . . . (reproduced in AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1787).

[72] Ibid.; "Location of the III Army on the evening of August 30, 1914," AFGG, I(II), Map #33; for the situation on Lanrezac's flank, see "Location of the Vth and VIth Armies and the British Army on the evening of August 31, 1914," AFGG, I(II), Map #14.

[73] See Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 3, 1914, pp. 85-86; #3523, personal memorandum from Joffre to the Minister of War, September 3, 1914, AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 2152; cf. Gallieni, Carnets, entry of September 1, 1914, p. 53; Gallieni was appointed Military Governor of Paris on August 26, 1914. (AFGG, X(I), 557.)

[74] HGW (1914), I, 243, n. 3; Tel. message #2838, [GQG to] Huguet, 30 August, [1914], 8:45 a.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1401; Tel. message #3024, Berthelot to Huguet, 31 August, [1914], 9:30 a.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1607.

This situation led Joffre to renew his urgent appeal to the Government, this time through Millerand, for political intervention. "If in the course of their retreat," he argued, the English Army "accepted to cooperate in a battle on the front north of Paris, that would be very advantageous." "But I cannot ask it of them," he complained, "having not yet obtained anything from them." "I do not know for sure, moreover, if they will consent," he concluded.[77] Timed to coincide with the meeting between Kitchener and Sir John in Paris, Joffre's new appeal would be taken up energetically by Millerand who, on this important occasion at least, showed himself equal to the task and capable of independent action.

---

[75] See tel. message #3055, Commander-in-Chief to Huguet, 31 August, [1914], 12:00 noon, *AFGG*, I(II) A(II), no. 1609; Lanrezac, *Plan de campagne*, p. 251. A German cavalry division was also sent against the British (communication of *GQG* [to VI Army], 31 August, [1914], 9:15 a.m., *AFGG*, I(II) A(II), no. 1606 and n. 3, p. 155), providing some justification for British retreat. Part of the German Cavalry Corps at Soissons, moreover, went in search of British rearguards on the morning of September 1, with the result that the British, despite their rearward position, were of more help to the French than Joffre acknowledged to Gallieni. (See Lanrezac, *Plan de campagne*, pp. 253.)

[76] Lanrezac, *Plan de campagne*, pp. 251-53; "Situation of the Vth and VIth Armies and *the British Army* at nightfall on August 30 and on August 31, 1914," *AFGG*, I(II), Maps #13, 14.

[77] CT #3173, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, September 1, 1914, *AG*, 16N1905, file: "Comptes rendus au Ministre du 29 août 1914 au 14 octobre 1914," (reproduced in *AFGG*, I(II) A(II), no. 1787).

• • •

Millerand's role in the resolution of the Anglo-French command crisis of late August, 1914, has generally been ignored by British authors.[78] Yet the evidence now available indicates that by the time Kitchener arrived in Paris, Millerand, through a private conversation with Sir John, had in fact done much to soothe his feelings and to prepare the way for a better understanding with Joffre. By subsequently urging Joffre to communicate more fully with the British and to establish a strategic plan to which all could agree, Millerand, in fact, played an important role in reorienting the French Command in their relationship with the British somewhat analogous to that of Kitchener in urging a more acceptable approach on Sir John.

No private conversation between Sir John and Millerand had been planned. The French President, upon learning that Kitchener was on his way to Paris, had, in fact, proposed a meeting of Kitchener, Sir John, Millerand and Joffre. Kitchener also favoured such a meeting, Poincaré noted, "but French, who impatiently tolerates the authority of the minister, judged unnecessary" a meeting of the four which Millerand, in any case, believed would be "difficult to arrange," because Joffre was that day in the process of setting up a new headquarters at Bar-Sur-Aube.[79] The meeting was thus held in Paris in the absence of Joffre; and Kitchener, who was to have met with Sir John at the British Embassy at 3:00 p.m., was delayed until 4:30 p.m. As a result, Sir John had a long conversation in the meantime with Millerand in the presence of liaison officers Clive, Huguet and Herbillon.[80]

---

[78] See Arthur, Kitchener, III, 54-55; Arthur Hodges, Lord Kitchener (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1936), pp. 237-38; HGW (1914), I, 263-64. Cf. Herbillon, Souvenirs, I, entry of September 1, 1914, pp. 20-22.

[79] Poincaré Papers, XXXVII, BN, NAF (16028), "Notes Journalières," entry of September 1, 1914. Cf. Poincaré, Au service, V, 229-30. Telephone communications were temporarily lacking with Paris on September 1, the day of the move. (See above references; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 1, 1914, pp. 77, 74.)

"Hard pressed" by Joffre, Poincaré and the British Government to either "stand or advance" on August 31, Sir John approached his meeting with Kitchener on September 1 in a recalcitrant frame of mind and with much rancour toward the French. His suspicions of them were most acute. "I should have been mad to stop there; they w[oul]d have gone back again, leaving my flanks open," he told Clive repeatedly in the car enroute to Paris.[81] Clive, for his part, pinpointed the serious problem of frequently altered and badly communicated plans emanating from GQG, which, indeed, had been a major cause of British loss of confidence in French leadership. "I did my best to rub in the necessity for getting a definite statement from the Minister or from Joffre," wrote Clive, "as to whether we are playing the game of the Russians in 1812, or merely waiting for a good opportunity to strike."[82] Sir John's interview with Millerand thus gave him an unexpected opportunity to vent these grievances against the French before a responsible minister.

---

[80] Clive Diaries, II/I, KCMA, entry of September 1, 1914; CT, Bertie [to Foreign Office], September 1, 1914, Grey Papers, PRO, FO/800/56A/9; Herbillon, Souvenirs, I, entry of September 1, 1914, p. 20. Herbillon's account, although the most extensive, is a secondary account. I have relied for the most part on eyewitness accounts written at the time. Sir John, in his memoirs, claims that Viviani, the French Premier, was also present (French, 1914, p. 96), but neither French's diary account, reproduced in Gerald French, The Life of Field Marshal Sir John French, First Earl of Ypres (London: Cassell, 1931), p. 22, nor any of the other eyewitness accounts mention his presence.

[81] Clive Diaries, II/I, KCMA, entry of September 1, 1914.

[82] Ibid.

In his "most interesting interview" with Millerand, Sir John "discussed the situation fully" and reiterated his bitterness against the French Command for not supporting him at Mons. He also indicated his intention of "withdrawing from the fight for the moment, in order to put his troops back into shape."[83] Millerand pointed to the grave need for Sir John to stay in the line and to "support the French Armies on his right and left as Paris still required three or four days to perfect its defence arrangements."[84] Sir John for his part "was determined to make it clear that he w[oul]d not stand unless his flanks were secure."[85]

The fundamental question of the overall French strategic plan was then raised by Clive, but Millerand was hard pressed to defend the continued retreats of his Commander-in-Chief. Refuting the suggestion that Joffre was merely marking time until the Russians reached Berlin, Millerand nonetheless was unable to satisfy Sir John as to why Joffre continued to retreat.[86] Clive recorded the rest of the discussion as follows:

> Millerand then said that he did not think that the question of a statement of the plan of campaign had been put to Joffre so clearly as it then was to him, but that he wd. communicate with Joffre, & doubtless Sir J's views wd. have great influence. The latter then suggested that the line of the Marne should be held, from beyond Paris to Verdun, great strength on the left, which should be the

---

[83] Quotations from Clive Diaries, II/I, KCMA, entry of September 1, 1914; French's diary, entry of September 1, 1914, quoted in Gerald French, Sir John French, p. 222 and Herbillon, Souvenirs, I, entry of September 1, 1914, p. 21.

[84] French's diary, entry of September 1, quoted in Gerald French, Sir John French, p. 222.

[85] Clive Diaries, II/I, KCMA, entry of September 1, 1914; see also Herbillon, Souvenirs, I, entry of September 1, 1914, p. 21.

[86] Clive Diaries, II/I, KCMA, entry of September 1, 1914; cf. Herbillon, Souvenirs, I, entry of September 1, 1914, p. 21.

offensive flank. He then dictated a letter which Huguet & I translated to Joffre; as we finished Ld. K[itchener] came.[87]

Millerand's discussion with Sir John could thus appear to have done much to facilitate Kitchener's task of convincing Sir John to cooperate more fully with the French Command. Having approached the conference in a very recalcitrant frame of mind, Sir John was now reverting to an attitude long held--that if the French would fight hard and defend his flanks, he would stand also. His Marne plan, indeed, seemed to indicate a renewed will to fight, especially in view of his earlier decision to fall back on the Seine. That new "will to fight," however, must be attributed more to the imminence of Kitchener's visit to enforce the policy of the British Government than to Millerand's sympathetic listening.[88] Sir John had already begun to trim his sails.

The chief value of Millerand's interview and subsequent action lay in its effect on Joffre. Having played the role of "honest broker" in hearing Sir John's side of the conflict, Millerand then used the weight of the Government to orient Joffre toward a better relationship with Sir John. Fully endorsing Sir John's proposed battle plan, which began pointedly with a call for a joint plan "understood by all," so that "all might cooperate in its execution,"[89] Millerand wrote Joffre that "the government is unanimous in desiring that you should see fit to accept Marshal French's plan." Although Millerand gave Joffre both full freedom and full responsibility for his decision, he went on to expostulate the virtues of the plan. "It appears, in first place, to be more favourable to the defence of Paris," he wrote, which as Joffre well knew was a matter of grave importance to the Government. Accepting the British plan moreover would "have as a result the drawing together of the two headquarters and the opening of channels toward a more intimate cooperation between chiefs," said Millerand.[90] Although Joffre's right to "weigh and act" was upheld,[91] the message made it abundantly clear that the French Government had serious reservations about Joffre's own plan for the defence of Paris and expected greater confidence and a much closer cooperation between the two Commands.

---

[87] Clive Diaries, II/I, KCMA, entry of September 1, 1914.

[88] See T., French to Kitchener, [September 1, 1914], in Arthur, Kitchener, III, 54, n. 1 in which Sir John affirmed that he was prepared to stand and fight in cooperation with the French only if he were compelled to by the Government, which would then have to accept full responsibility.

[89] "Proposition du Maréchal Sir John French," September 1, 1914, Millerand Papers, BN, Carton 20 (reproduced in AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1797).

Joffre was at that time in no position to resist Government counsel. That very day he had recommended the removal of the Government from Paris because of his inability to halt the advance of the German Armies.[92] Unbeknown to Joffre, a movement was already afoot, led by Gaston Doumer, an influential Socialist and friend of Gallieni, to get rid of him.[93] "General Joffre, engineer," confided Poincaré to his diary on September 1, 1914, after talking with Doumer, "has been a very unfortunate soldier."[94]

---

[90] Personal letter of Millerand to Joffre, 1/9-14, *AG*, Fonds Buat 6N7, file: Ordres généraux du *GQG*, September 1914, (reproduced in *AFGG*, I(II) A(II), no. 1774).

[91] *Ibid.* Millerand, in a separate communication the next day, also recommended a "permanent liaison" system with Sir John. Recognizing the need to keep the British better informed, Joffre appointed Lieutenant-Colonel Lerond to assist Huguet at British Headquarters on September 5. (Poincaré Papers, XXXVII, *BN*, NAF (16028), "Notes Journalières," Septembre - Decembre 1914, entries of September 2, 5, 1914, pp. 5, 14.)

[92] CT 3173, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, September 1, 1914, *AG*, 16N1905, file: "Comptes rendus au Ministre du 29 août 1914 au 14 octobre 1914," (reproduced in *AFGG*, I(II) A(II), no. 1787).

[93] Poincaré Papers, XXXVI, *BN*, NAF (16027), "Notes Journalières," March - August, 1914, entry of September 1, 1914, p. 273.

As a result of Millerand's intervention, a noticeable change took place in Joffre's outward attitude toward the British. Although he was scornful of Sir John's plan because it prescribed a defensive battle on the Marne and seemed premature, reinforcements to the French left having not yet arrived,[95] Joffre replied to Sir John the next day in a "very nice and friendly letter,"[96] purposefully citing the most palatable reason possible for his inability to accept the British plan:[97] "The location of the Vth Army does not permit that Army to assure a sufficiently effective support to the English Army on its right," he observed. At the same time he invited Sir John to participate with the Sixth Army in the defence of Paris by progressively withdrawing to the position Melun-Juvisy behind the Seine above Paris in harmony with Sir John's earlier request.[98] "The password is to be friendly," wrote Berthelot in his diary, and in an obvious attempt to foster good will, a large number of decorations were also sent to the British Army, with rather favourable results.[99]

---

[94] Poincaré Papers, XXXVII, BN, NAF (16028), "Notes Journalières," September - December, 1914, entry of September 1, 1914, p. 2; Poincaré, Au service, V, 226, 251-53.

[95] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 363-64 and n. 1, p. 363; cf. Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 1, 1914, p. 78.

[96] French, Diaries, entry of September 3, 1914, p. 149; Berthelot was instructed to draft such a letter. (Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 2, 1914, p. 81.)

[97] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 364.

[98] #3332, Letter, Commander-in-Chief to Commander-in-Chief, English Forces, September 2, 1914, [8:00 a.m.], AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1980 and n. 2, p. 414, and #3331, Letter, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, September 2, 1914, [8:00 a.m.], AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1979 and n. 3, p. 413. The fact that a copy of Joffre's reply to the Minister was sent to Sir John was a further indication of confidence.

The problem of apparent drift in French strategic leadership, the result of no fixed plan and inadequate communication with the British, was also resolved through Millerand's timely action. Having learned on the 31st of the deflection of von Kluck's Army to the south,[100] Joffre, as noted, immediately revived his Seine manoeuvre, which provided for a French counter-offensive on the Seine, but with a flank attack by the Paris Army. Given final form on September 1, this plan was communicated to all the Army commanders[101]--all, that is, except the British. Only a day later, after receipt of Millerand's letter urging closer cooperation, did Joffre forsake his secretiveness and communicate this plan to the British Command. He naturally deleted an abrasive passage which had attributed general French retreat to the failure of the British and the Sixth Army to halt the German flanking movement.[102] "I fully and clearly understand your plans and the part that you wish me to play in their execution," replied Sir John in an amiable letter on September 3.[103]

---

[99] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 2, 1914, p. 80; Letter of Sir John French to Commander-in-Chief, 3/9/1914, 12:00 noon, AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1267.

[100] See CT 3173, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, September 1, 1914, AG, 16N1905, file "Comptes rendus au Ministre du 29 août 1914 au 14 octobre 1914" (reproduced in AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1787).

[101] Berthelot, Diary, entry of September 1, 1914, pp. 80-81; Herbillon, Souvenirs, I, entry of August 31, 1914, p. 20; #3205, General Instruction no. 4 [to the V, IV, III Armies], September 1, [1914], 2:00 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1792.

[102] General Instruction no. 4, AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1793 and n. 1, p. 288. Cf. #3205 above. See also Joffre, Mémoires, I, 364. Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 1, 1914, p. 81 indicates General Instruction no. 4 was to accompany Joffre's letter to Sir John on September 2. But the copy of the order at French GQG contains the notation "Communiqué à la mission française par GQG anglais le 3 septembre" and "Examplaire modifié pour les W."

[103] See letter, Sir John French to Commander-in-Chief, 3/9/1914, 12:00 noon, AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 2167.

The misunderstanding over confused plans thus appeared well on its way to resolution.

Even more significant for the resolution of the command crisis than Millerand's reorientation of Joffre was Kitchener's firm injunction to Sir John on September 1 that he cooperate more fully with the movements of the French Army. Although Sir John would deny in his memoirs that the meeting with Kitchener on September 1 had any real significance,[104] the evidence now available confirms the accepted view that Sir John was in fact instructed to retain his place in the Allied line and to coordinate with the movements of the French Army.

The exchange between Sir John and Kitchener on September 1 was a very stormy one, not only because of the issues at stake but because of a clash of personalities. Imperious by nature, Kitchener arrived in Paris in Field Marshal Khaki which, to Sir John, implied his coming as a superior officer rather than as a representative of the Cabinet.[105] Kitchener, moreover, exercised his mandate to the full, expressed his desire to "visit Joffre and the troops" and immediately began to explore with Sir John the capabilities of the British Expeditionary Force.[106] Resentful of superior authority of any kind and especially of Kitchener, with whom relations "had been poor since the time of the South African

---

[104] French, 1914, pp. 99-101; see also his diary account published in Gerald French, Sir John French, p. 222.

[105] French, 1914, p. 99; Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 277. In Kitchener's defence, it must be noted that he habitually wore khaki at the War Office. (Arthur, Kitchener, III, 54.) Cf. Cassar, Kitchener, pp. 237-39.

[106] French's diary, entry of September 1, 1914, published in Gerald French, Sir John French, p. 222; cf. French, 1914, p. 99; Herbillon, Souvenirs, I, entry of September 1, 1914, p. 22.

War,"[107] Sir John, irritated at having to leave his Command at a dangerous moment, immediately protested Kitchener's unwarranted interference in his conduct of operations. Rather than quarrel in front of the French, Kitchener abruptly closed the discussion and asked Sir John to meet with him in a private room.[108]

What then went on behind closed doors is not entirely clear. According to his memoir account, Sir John hotly contested Kitchener's interference in his Command and the advice he attempted to give. "I said that the command of the British Forces in France had been entrusted to me by His Majesty's Government," he later wrote, "that I alone was responsible to them for whatever happened, and that on French soil my authority as regards the British Army must be supreme until I was legally superseded by the same authority which had put that responsibility upon me."[109] Theoretically correct by accepted canons of military thought,[110] Sir John's argument nonetheless failed to appreciate that Kitchener was acting on behalf of the British Government, which undoubtedly had the right to intervene in operational matters when vital political interests were at stake.[111] The question at stake, he failed to appreciate, was not merely a campaign but French survival, a sufficiently important matter to warrant political intervention.

According to his memoir account, Sir John further objected to

---

[107] Alan Clark, The Donkeys (London: Hutchinson, 1961), p. 26.

[108] French, 1914, pp. 96, 99-100; cf. Herbillon, Souvenirs, I, entry of September 1, 1914, p. 22; Letter, Sir John French to Churchill, September 6, 1914, in Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 278-79.

[109] French, 1914, p. 100.

[110] See, for example, H. Rothfels, "Clausewitz," in Earle, ed., Makers of Modern Strategy, pp. 104-05.

[111] But see Ibid., pp. 105-06.

Kitchener's "presence in France in the character of a soldier," which could, he said, only "weaken and prejudice" his own position before the French and his troops.[112] This was a valid point. On the related question of Kitchener's proposed visit to the troops, moreover, Sir John found a ready ally in the British Ambassador, Bertie, who personally remonstrated with Kitchener after the interview. "Such a visit," Bertie objected, convincingly, "would have a most unfortunate effect on public opinion" and would "create an impression that Sir John French had not given satisfaction to his Majesty's Government and that British troops were to blame for recent reverses to [the] French Army."[113] Although referring the matter to London for further advice, Kitchener yielded to the weight of those arguments and abandoned the cherished idea of visiting the troops.[114] "We had a disagreeable time!" recorded Sir John in his diary. "I think K. found he was making a mistake," he continued, relating his apparent victory, "for he said he would leave to-night or tomorrow morning." "I don't know what good this journey has done," he concluded with some pique, "beyond making us all feel very uncomfortable."[115]

---

[112] French, 1914, p. 100.

[113] Viscount Bertie of Thame, The Diary of Lord Bertie of Thame, 1914-1918, ed. by Lady Algernon Gordon Lennox (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1924), Vol. I, entry of September 1, 1914, pp. 25-26; CT, Sir Francis Bertie, Paris, September 1, [1914], dispatched 5:45 p.m., PRO, Grey Papers, FO 800/56A/9. Cf. French, 1914, p. 99 and French's diary, entry of September 1, 1914, published in Gerald French, Sir John French, p. 222; Cassar, Kitchener, p. 237.

[114] CT Sir F. Bertie, Paris, September 1, [1914], dispatched 5:45 p.m.; CT Bertie to Grey, 1 September, 1914, dispatched 8:00 p.m., PRO, Grey Papers, FO 800/56A/9 and 6.

[115] French's diary, entry of September 1, 1914, published in Gerald French, Sir John French, p. 222.

Sir John, however, failed to relate the full scope of the conversation in his diary and later memoirs, thus giving a distorted account of his pyrrhic triumph over Kitchener. On the more substantive question of coordination with the French, Kitchener, as revealed in his letter to Sir John later in the evening, had his own way entirely.

> After thinking over our conversation today, he wrote, I think I am giving the sense of it in the following telegram to [the] Gov't I have just sent:
>
> "French's troops are now engaged in the fighting line where he will remain conforming to the movements of the French Army, though, at the same time acting with caution to avoid being in any way unsupported on his flanks."
>
> I am sure you will agree that the above represents the conclusions we came to, but in any case, until I can communicate with you further . . . please consider it as an instruction.[116]

That instruction was followed by others equally specific showing that Kitchener exercised nearly full authority over Sir John on that occasion, going even beyond his mandate as a representative of the British Cabinet. Continuing in an imperious though courteous tone, Kitchener further reflected the wide ranging scope of their discussion by encouraging Sir John to "make the best plans possible for the future" with Joffre. But, significantly, he asked that these plans be communicated to the War Office in London. Sir John's latitude of decision-making was thus further circumscribed. At the same time, Kitchener urged the British Chief to do his "utmost to refit as soon as possible from the lines of communications, & put in men & horses necessary to refill units to their proper strength."[117] "I fully understand your instructions," a somewhat chastened Sir John replied two days later on September 3, and concluded, "I am in full accord with Joffre and the French."[118] The same day, Sir John promised Joffre his "most cordial collaboration" in the execution of his new plan,[119] signifying that the command crisis had effectively been resolved. Kitchener had indeed made his point!

---

[116] Copy of personal letter, Kitchener to French, 1 September, [1914], 7:30 p.m., Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/14.

[117] Ibid.

That accord was bought at a price in his relationship with Sir John, however, as witnessed by the latter's letter to Churchill on September 6 asking him to "stop this interference with field operations."[120] A modicum of cordiality was nonetheless maintained at the end of the interview for the benefit of the French. "I watched them walking up and down the grass," wrote Clive of the last scene of the interview. "They wd. have been arm in arm, but Ld. K. was so much the taller that his arm was nearly around Sir John's neck."[121] News of an attack upon his Army at Villers-Cotterets then led Sir John to hasten back to British Headquarters.[122]

That Sir John found himself "in full accord" with Joffre and the French on September 3 can only be attributed to the pressure brought to bear on him by his Government. This change of attitude had been dramatic, for as late as September 1, just prior to Kitchener's visit, Sir John had protested the total inability of his Force to effectively support the French, "no matter what their positions may be." "I am sure I need not tell you," he wrote, "that if you choose to order it we will go up into the front lines tomorrow and do our utmost, but I am convinced [that] it would end in grave disaster to the French troops . . . ." "I should be culpably wanting in my duty if I did not make our position perfectly clear to you," he concluded,[123] putting full responsibility for what he anticipated as a major disaster upon the Government. Sir John thus demonstrated rather conclusively the falsity of his later assertion that he marched on the Marne of his own free will.[124]

---

[118] Letter, French to Kitchener, September 3, [1914], 6:30 a.m., Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/15.

[119] See letter, Sir John French to Commander-in-Chief [Joffre], 3/9/1914, 12:00 noon, AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 2167.

[120] Letter, Sir John French to Churchill, September 6, 1914, qu[illegible] in Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 278-79; see also Letter, Sir John French to Churchill, September 10, 1914, in Ibid., pp. 279-80.

[121] Clive Diaries, II/I, KCMA, entry of September 1, 1914. Cf. French, 1914, p. 100.

[122] Clive Diaries, II/I, KCMA, entry of September 1, 1914.

Political intervention therefore was entirely decisive in restoring military collaboration between the two Allied Commands prior to the Battle of the Marne. Kitchener, acting for the British Cabinet, obliged Sir John to coordinate with the French and must be considered one of the major heroes of the Marne reversal. Millerand played an important role also. Using the force of his Government, it was he who persuaded Joffre to adopt a more friendly and confiding attitude toward Sir John, making effective liaison possible. The political *Entente* thus saved the day at a moment when the breakdown of military relations threatened disaster.

If Kitchener's visit stiffened Sir John's will to face the enemy, it also led to an improvement in the means at his disposal. Kitchener was to find to his amazement that although "ample" men and material had been dispatched to make good Sir John's losses, almost none had reached him.[125] In fact, frequent change of base had led to a serious dislocation in the lines of communication, men and material having gone from Boulogne and Le Havre to Rouen and then to St. Nazaire, but none to the front. Sir John moreover had shown reluctance to send men forward to fill the gaps in his retreating Army, and complained on September 1, when reinforcements finally began to arrive, of the "impossibility of making things right so long as we are in close contact with the enemy."[126] Pushed forward by Kitchener, the first ten per cent reinforcements of all units had arrived by September 4-5, and, integrated under his orders, did much to replace Sir John's loss of 20,000, although his II Corps was still badly lacking in men and short one-third of its artillery as decisive action approached.[127] Fully apprised of the gravity of the military situation, moreover, Kitchener once back in London obtained permission from the Cabinet on September 3 to send the disputed 6th Division, the last of the original regular divisions, to the front to reinforce Sir John's Army. It arrived on September 16, just in time to participate in the Battle of the Aisne.[128]

---

[123] Copy of telegram, French to Kitchener, 4 [1] September, [1914], Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/18; cf. Arthur, *Kitchener*, III, 54.

[124] See French, 1914, pp. 99ff. On matters of interpretation, Sir John's memoirs have proved less than reliable.

By adjusting Sir John's instructions to cooperate more fully with the French and by giving him the means to accomplish this mission, Kitchener substantially increased British commitment to defence of the continent. In view of the serious military situation and the apparent inability of the French to stand alone, increased British participation was, in fact, the only alternative to the grave risk of Allied defeat in France. The mechanism by which the British were dragged into an ever-increasing commitment to the French throughout most of the war thus began to make its impact felt in response to the first command crisis.

---

[125] Letter, Asquith to the King, 5 September, 1914, PRO, Cab 41/35/41 R/178. Cf. HGW (1914), I, 286-87.

[126] Copy of telegram, French to Kitchener, [1] September, [1914], Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/18. See Arthur, Kitchener, III, 54, n. 1.

[127] HGW (1914), I, 286-87.

[128] Asquith, Memories and Reflections, II, 31; cf. HGW (1914), I, 230, 240.

CHAPTER VII

COORDINATION IN THE FIELD AND THE PREPARATION OF THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE

SEPTEMBER 3 - 5, 1914

Although Sir John French had agreed on September 3 to support Joffre's proposed Seine manoeuvre, the Allied armies were still in retreat. The precise moment for the counter-offensive, moreover, had not been specified and no effective arrangements for a counter-attack had been made. Joffre, in fact, held out the possibility of attacking prematurely before the Seine was reached.[1] The situation thus remained clouded and, as at Mons, because of the lack of precise instructions, much depended on effective cooperation between the commanders in the field.

The Renewal of on-the-spot Coordination

Fortunately for the Allies, better relations began to prevail between Sir John and the French generals on either side of him. Indeed, since the formation of the Sixth Army, Maunoury on his left had shown an attitude of solidarity, as witnessed by his timely aid at Le Cateau on August 26 and his attempt on September 1 to plug a gap on the British left.[2] As the British Army approached Paris, moreover, the British Command came into contact with Gallieni, who had been appointed the Military Governor on August 26 and who commanded the Paris Army to which Maunoury was subordinated on September 1. Despite his own mild anglophobia, Gallieni made a considerable effort to cultivate the good will and cooperation of the British Chief.[3] In a welcoming letter to Sir John on September 1, for example, even prior to Joffre's instruction to "keep in close touch" with the British, Gallieni, on his own initiative, praised the valiant effort of the British troops, made reference to Sir John's illustrious South African career, and set the tone for frank and honest communications between the two by revealing his position and plans, while asking the same of the British.[4] Sir John responded warmly to the compliments of the General, whose "reputation in Madagascar" was widely known, and an element of overt cordiality immediately developed between the two, auguring well for future relations.[5]

---

[1] #3205, General Instruction no. 4 [to III - V Armies], September 1, [1914], [to] British HQ, September 3,[1914], AFGG, I(II) A(II), nos. 1792, 1793.

[2] Tel. message, General Commanding VIth Army to Marshal French,

But as in the new relationship between Sir John and Joffre, much suspicion remained in the background. Sir John's retreat on September 1, for example, which was intended to bring the BEF to safety behind the Marne on the 3rd beyond the grasp of the new German advance on his front, brought these misgivings to the fore.[6] Gallieni took a dim view of this

---

September 1, 1914, 9:10 a.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1862; see also Spears, Liaison, pp. 330-31; Desmazes, Joffre, pp. 111-12.

[3] See Gallieni, Carnets, pp. 53ff.

[4] Desmazes, Joffre, pp. 113-14; Gallieni, Military Governor of Paris and Commander of the Paris Armies, to Marshal French, September 1, 1914, AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1808; Tel. message #612 D/5, Military Governor of Paris to Commander of VIth Army, September 1, 1914, AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1806.

[5] See French, 1914, p. 103.

[6] Huguet to VIth Army, September 1, [1914], 10:00 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1802; Report to Gallieni of [the] Captain returning from

retreat, which Maunoury had attempted unsuccessfully to have delayed.[7] Reflecting his deep-seated suspicions, the Commander of the Paris Army cast serious aspersions on Sir John's ultimate intention in a pessimistic report to Joffre on September 2. "I have the impression," he wrote, "that he is going to retreat without worrying either about Paris or even about the mission that you have given him, of which I am unaware."[8]

Then, on September 2, the day after Kitchener's visit, just as Gallieni was beginning to lose confidence in the British will to fight, Sir John began to rally. Two officers sent to British Headquarters by Gallieni to inquire into the British attitude returned with the unexpected report that "French asks only to march. He . . . will hold on the Marne." The reception had been very cordial and British troops, they reported, were "well in hand."[9] Sir John's orders that evening, moreover,

---

British GHQ, September 2, 1914, AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 2007 and n. 2, p. 427; CT #120, Huguet to GQG, September 2, [1914], 12:50 a.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1999. The German march on the far left of the Allied line on September 1 and 2 appeared to be a diversion intended to mask the main thrust against the left of Lanrezac's Army. (See Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 2, 1914, p. 80; cf. French, 1914, pp. 104-05.) In actual fact, von Kluck hoped to settle matters with the British before moving on to his major objective (HGW (1914), I, 265-66, 287-88), but the British retreated out of his grasp. (Ibid., p. 288.)

[7] Commander VIth Army to Commander British Army, September 1, 1914, 6:45, AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1867. Sir John, on the other hand, was disappointed that Maunoury was not able to take the pressure off his flank by attacking the Germans. (CT #614, Gallieni to Marshal French, September 2, [1914], 10:00 a.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 2013; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 2, 1914, pp. 80, 84.)

[8] Letter, Gallieni to Joffre, September 2, 1914, (noon), AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 2016; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 2, 1914, p. 80. The latter observation reflected Gallieni's growing bitterness with Joffre's inadequate preparation for the defence of Paris and his failure to confide his plans to the Military Governor. (See Ibid., p. 79 and entry of September 2, 1914, p. 84.)

[9] Gallieni, Carnets, entry of September 2, 1914, p. 54; cf. French, 1914, p. 101.

for the rightward deployment of his troops behind the Marne, so as not only to avoid crossing the defences of the fortified Paris region but to narrow the gap with Lanrezac, suggested renewed British willingness to fight.[10] Gallieni, in consequence, was able to build upon the foundation of initial cordiality and good faith in drawing up with the British Command a joint, albeit defective, plan of action on September 4. The vital relationship between the two commanders, although imperfect, was sufficiently good to allow for effective local cooperation between them.

The bitter conflict which had festered between Sir John and Lanrezac, on the other hand, was further aggravated on September 2 by a new incident, provoked by von Kluck's advance into the gap between the two armies. On that day, elements of von Kluck's cavalry again penetrated behind the left of the Fifth Army, this time to Chateau-Thierry on the Marne.[11] Instructed by Joffre to escape the menace to his Army by continuous retreat to the Seine,[12] Lanrezac scrambled to safety behind the Marne later that night. Not until September 3 was the new Cavalry Corps, set up belatedly on September 1 under Conneau, able to establish liaison with British Cavalry and thus screen the wide gap between the two armies.[13]

---

[10] #615, Gallieni to French, September 2, [1914], 11:45 a.m., *AFGG*, I(II) A(II), no. 2015; CT #124, 129, Huguet [to *GQG*], September 2, 1914, 6:40, 9:00 p.m., *AFGG*, I(II) A(II), nos. 2005-06; French, *1914*, p. 104; Wilson Diaries, *IWM*, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 2, 1914.

[11] Lanrezac, *Plan de campagne*, pp. 265-67; "Location of the VIth, Vth and British Armies at nightfall, September 2, 1914," *AFGG*, I(II), Map #60. Cf. #3523, Personal memorandum from Joffre to the Minister of War, September 3, 1914, *AFGG*, I(II) A(II), no. 2152.

[12] CT #3322, *GQG* [to Vth Army], received September 2, [1914], 10:30 a.m., *AFGG*, I(II) A(II), no. 1976.

[13] Lanrezac, *Plan de campagne*, pp. 259-61, 266-67, 269; CT #5487, Huguet to *GQG*, [September 2, 1914], 1:15 p.m., *AFGG*, I(II) A(II), no.

Sir John reacted sharply to Lanrezac's retreat. Still thinking of holding on the Marne, he apparently was aware of Joffre's order to retreat, but not the new manoeuvre of which it was a part. In a curt note to Joffre he demanded an explanation for this unwarranted retreat, which appeared to negate any idea of a new counter-offensive.[14] Joffre's terse reply that Lanrezac's retreat was necessary to prevent the envelopment of his flank provided little immediate comfort.[15]

Indeed, the German advance into the fissure between the two Allied armies continued to impose a heavy burden on their cooperation. Differences in conception, mutual dislike and mutual distrust between Sir John and Lanrezac had been aggravated from the beginning of the campaign by the German advance into the "centre of gravity" of the military alliance, the juncture of the two armies. The strains which reverberated had engulfed not only the two field commanders in irreversible conflict but had embroiled the French and British High Commands to the point that Government intervention had been necessary to resolve the conflict. The cleavage between Lanrezac and Sir John, personal in its origin, exacerbated by events, now required equally drastic action for its resolution.

Joffre solved the problem by dismissing Lanrezac as Commander of the Fifth Army. The Commander-in-Chief had long since come to the conclusion that Lanrezac was responsible for much of the difficulty with

---

2003; Tel. message #3444, Commander-in-Chief to Huguet, September 2, 1914, 6:15 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1990. That German cavalry would also pass through the gap to the British rear at Meaux was a great source of concern for British GHQ. (CT #124, Huguet to GQG, September 2, 1914, 6:40 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 2005.)

[14] See CT #122, Huguet to GQG, September 2, 1914, 1:50 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1989. Cf. Spears, Liaison, pp. 350-51 and n. 1, p. 351.

[15] CT #3420, Commander-in-Chief to Huguet, September 2, 1914, 5:00 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1989; see Spears, Liaison, p. 351.

Sir John,[16] and vindictive by nature, was not above finding in him a scapegoat for his own mistakes.[17] He resented Lanrezac's frequent questioning of orders and professorial comment on instructions, moreover, and considered him "hesitant and indecisive" as a commander.[18] In General Franchet d'Esperey, Corps Commander in the Fifth Army, Joffre found a suitable successor. A fighting general, d'Esperey unlike Lanrezac was imbued with the spirit of the offensive and, a true warrior, took delight in combat.[19] Given command of the Fifth Army on September 3, he was instructed to "act in close and cordial relationship" with Sir John and to develop an understanding upon which Joffre could rely with confidence.[20]

D'Esperey, future Marshal of France, was indeed the right man to lead the battered Fifth Army in the vigourous counter-thrust desired. His assertion the next day that the Fifth Army could fight on September 6 was instrumental in Joffre's decision to launch the offensive on that day.[21] The replacement of Lanrezac moreover fully vindicated Sir John's grievance against him, and the appointment of a vigourous chief, who incidentally held a British KCVO and was already familiar with the British

---

[16] Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 332, 369-70.

[17] Cf. Lanrezac, *Plan de campagne*, p. 277.

[18] *Ibid.*, pp. 276-77; Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 369-70; cf. Spears, *Liaison*, pp. 367-68, 370-71. Joffre had planned to remove Lanrezac on August 29 but changed his mind on arrival at his HQ. (Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 338-40; Lanrezac, *Plan de campagne*, p. 236 and n. 1, p. 279-80.)

[19] Gamelin, *Manoeuvre*, pp. 110-11. Cf. Spears, *Liaison*, pp. 383-85.

[20] CT #2652, Commander-in-Chief to Huguet, September 4, 1914, 7:45 a.m., *AFGG*, I(II) A(II), no. 2319.

[21] Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 388-89.

Army,[22] opened the way for improved relations with Sir John and effective coordination in the field.

This, of course, is not to detract from Lanrezac's military contribution. More farsighted than his Chief, he had recognized early the nature of the German plan and had preserved his army intact by a skilful manoeuvre all across northern France.[23] But his anglophobia and lack of solidarity with the British were too great a liability and his leadership too faltering and indecisive for the grave task at hand. In replacing him, Joffre paved the way for local understanding with Sir John, which, along with a more favourable strategic situation and the renewal of British will to fight, was an essential condition for the successful preparation of the Battle of the Marne.

Immediate Origins of the Battle of the Marne

The great dénouement in Allied military planning came on September 3 - 5. This, however, must be seen in terms of the context of the conflict at GQG which led to disjointed direction from GQG and which for a short time gave more discretionary powers to the field commanders. Indeed, the question of the time for the attack on the German flank was a debate of long standing at GQG. As early as the evening of August 31, for example, Maunoury had suggested that his Army march into von Kluck's exposed right flank as the German First Army began its move to the southeast.[24] Then again, on the morning of September 2, there was considerable "effervescence" among the officers of the Third Bureau at French Headquarters over the possibility of marching into the exposed German flank.[25] On both occasions the proposed flank attack was rejected as premature by the French Command under the influence of Berthelot who still had the ear of the Chief and who favoured a general battle under more favourable circumstances on the Seine. After the debate at French Headquarters on September 2, Berthelot obtained a reaffirmation of the Seine manoeuvre for the Army Commanders, dropping any question of an earlier attack.[26] The senior advisors for the moment thus appeared to have the upper hand over the Third Bureau at GQG.

---

[22] Spears, Liaison, p. 384.

[23] Cf. Lanrezac, Plan de campagne, p. 284; Spears, Liaison, pp. 369-71.

[24] #372, [VIth] Army to Commander-in-Chief, 31 August, [1914], 11:55 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1689 and n. 1, p. 209.

But Joffre had come to plan his manoeuvre largely around British participation, which he considered essential for any successful counter-attack. The French, in fact, depended on the BEF, because of its vital position, far beyond what the size of the Force would warrant. Therefore, when on September 3, word came from British Headquarters that the British Army might be able to march into the German flank on the evening of September 4,[27] the results were electrifying. That message, although a false start, sparked consideration of an immediate counter-offensive which ultimately led to the First Battle of the Marne.

---

[25] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 2, 1914, p. 82.

[26] Ibid., entries of September 1, 2, 1914, pp. 77-78, 82-83; CT #3164, [GQG to] VIth Army, September 1, 1914, 8:20 a.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1783. "I had no trouble," wrote Berthelot on September 2, "in rallying General Joffre and Belin to my opinion during the meeting of this afternoon, which took place at the instigation of Gamelin, and which was attended by Belin, Pellé and the heads of the Second and Third Bureaus, Dupont and Pont." (Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 2, 1914, p. 83; #3463, Memorandum for Army Commanders, September 2, 1914, AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1993 and n. 3, p. 419.)

[27] Tel. message, Mission "W" to Commander-in-Chief, September 3, [1914], 10:00 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 2174 and n. 2, p. 545.

The British offer must be seen in the context of the power struggle also going on at British Headquarters between Murray and Wilson, the former representing utmost caution, the latter, reckless combativity. Since the fainting collapse -- "fainting fit," in Wilson's words -- of Sir Archibald Murray on August 26, just prior to the British rout at Le Cateau, the British Chief of Staff had been imbued with an evergrowing sense of pessimism. "Archie is quite hopeless & Sir John does not realize what has happened," Wilson wrote on August 27.[28] Murray's influence was further assessed on August 29.

> . . . a perfect debacle . . . at H^{d} Q^{r}. Murray leading the fright. Allenby & Rawlinson told me about it. Sir John and Murray ought to be ashamed of themselves.
>
> The difficulty is that Sir John has not once taken command & Murray is a danger since his fright at St. Quentin.[29]

Although Wilson's "iron nerve and frame" under the stress of retreat were greatly appreciated by Sir John,[30] Murray's pessimistic attitude prevailed at British Headquarters until Kitchener's tonic visit to Paris on September 1.

Sir John then began to reconsider the possibility of fighting. When aerial reports confirmed on September 3 that all of von Kluck's Army except a single corps was about to cross the Marne between Ferté-sous-Jouarre and Chateau-Thierry in pursuit of the French Fifth Army,[31]

---

[28] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of August 27, 1914. See also his entry for August 26 on Murray's health.

[29] Ibid., entry of August 29, 1914.

[30] French, 1914, pp. 107-08. Wilson's assessment of Sir John was not so favourable. "A nice old man but absolutely no brains," he wrote of him on September 3, 1914. "When a crisis comes, Murray is useless," he further complained. (Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 3, 1914.)

[31] CT #136, Huguet to GQG, September 3, 1914, 7:45 p.m., and tel. message, Huguet to GQG, September 3, [1914], 8:40 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II),

Wilson presented the case for a flank attack and, temporarily gaining the upper hand,[32] obtained Sir John's approval, providing, of course, that the Sixth Army on his left "undertook an analogous movement." GQG was informed that the manoeuvre might begin as early as the evening of September 4 when reinforcements had been integrated into the British Force.[33]

The British offer, which exceeded Sir John's pledge of the same day to cooperate with Joffre on his Seine manoeuvre, was decisive. Prepared to make every reasonable sacrifice, including adjustment of his plans, to consolidate the British offer and to gain full British participation in the forthcoming attack, Joffre immediately began to think in terms of a revision of his Seine plan so as to allow for a flank attack by the British and the Paris Army before his centre armies reached the Seine.[34] To Gallieni, who was very pessimistic about the ability of Paris to hold against an attack and repeatedly asked for instructions during the day,[35] Joffre thus wrote in a private letter late that evening that the time had come for a portion of the Sixth Army to move eastward "as a threat to the German right, so that the English left feels supported." Joffre himself, therefore, raised the possibility of an immediate attack on the German flank. Gallieni, moreover, was further instructed to advise Sir John of this deployment and to enter into close

---

no. 2169; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 378.

[32] Huguet, Britain and the War, pp. 88-89.

[33] Tel. message, Mission "W" to Commander-in-Chief, September 3, [1914], 10:00 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 2174 and n. 2, p. 545; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 379.

[34] See Joffre, Mémoires, I, 379.

[35] #176 3/5, Military Governor of Paris to Commander-in-Chief, September 3, [1914], 9:10 a.m. and letter, Gallieni to Joffre, September 3, 1914, AFGG, I(II) A(II), nos. 2179, 2180.

contact with him,[36] Joffre having now learned, mainly by sad experience, the necessity for strong flank support and close cooperation in dealing with the British.

Much debate in French historiography between the apologists of Joffre and Gallieni has centred on the role of Gallieni in initiating the Marne attack. On the morning of September 4, he instructed the Sixth Army to prepare to deploy eastward, and in the afternoon he entered into talks with the British on a combined attack. His apologists have ascribed these actions, largely on the basis of his memoirs and diary, to his own initiative.[37] But it is almost certain that Joffre's letter, which was dispatched from *GQG* at 2:50 a.m., along with official instructions that the Paris Army deploy south of the Marne in the direction of Meaux so as to more fully support the British, was in Gallieni's hands in good time and served as the basis for his action on the 4th.[38] The real stimulus for preparation of the battle was the British offer on September 3 to march into the German flank.

---

[36] Desmazes, *Joffre*, pp. 113-14; Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 379.

[37] Jean d'Esme, *Gallieni, destin hors série* (Paris: Plon, 1965), pp. 280-303 follows Gallieni's version very closely, while Gallieni's Chief of Staff, Colonel Henry Charbonnel, *De Madagascar à Verdun* (Paris: Karolus, 1962), pp. 300-06, badly distorts the facts. For more balanced accounts, see Pierre Lyautey, *Gallieni* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), pp. 238-57 and Pierre Lyet, "La Marne," *Revue historique de l'Armée*, XX (1964), 69-88. Cf. Gallieni, *Carnets*, entry of September 3-4, 1914, pp. 55-71 and n. 1, p. 70; J. S. Gallieni, *Mémoires du Maréchal Gallieni* (Paris: Payot, 1926), pp. 90-123. By April 30, 1915, Gallieni, then writing his memoirs, had concluded, "The more I study the question of the Marne, the more clearly I understand the day of September 4. Nothing would have been done had I not insisted to the *GQG* and to French. In sum, I marched and they followed." (*Ibid.*, p. 164.)

[38] Desmazes, *Joffre*, p. 113, n. 1; Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 379; #3636, Commander-in-Chief to Military Governor of Paris, September 4, 1914, 2:50 a.m., *AFGG*, I(II) A(II), no. 2317. The original of Joffre's letter to Gallieni, dated September 3, 1914, is held in the Gallieni family archives. (Capitaine P. Lyet, *Joffre et Gallieni à la Marne* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1938), p. 18, n. 1.) Cf. Charbonnel, *De Madagascar à Verdun*, pp. 319-23, who makes an absurd case for the letter being a *post-facto* forgery.

Local Coordination on September 4, 1914

Unfortunately for Gallieni's coordination with the British, Joffre was still groping for a final solution and had not worked out all the implications of his new directive for the deployment of the Paris and British Armies. His chief concern was to provide strong flank support for the British without which, said a later directive, the "English would not march."[39] He therefore erred by instructing Gallieni to deploy south of the Marne as in the original Seine manoeuvre.[40] In a personal letter to Sir John French on the morning of September 4, moreover, which encouraged the British to profit from the favourable strategic situation by counter-attacking before reaching the Seine, he reaffirmed that the Paris Army would attack eastward on the south bank of the Marne in order to more fully support the British left wing.[41] What the French Command then failed to realize was that the BEF itself should have been assigned the zone directly south of the Marne in an early attack. By inflexibly assigning that zone to Gallieni, Joffre obliged the British to retreat another day to make room for the Paris Army on the south bank of the Marne. Gallieni, by that deployment, moreover, would be obliged to a flank attack on the forward rather than the rear flank of von Kluck's Army.[42] Yet these inflexible and inadequate instructions served as the basis for Gallieni's negotiations with the British Command on September 4, giving rise to important deficiencies in his arrangements with them.

---

[39] CT #3703, Commander-in-Chief to Military Governor of Paris, September 4, [1914], received by French Mission at British HQ at 1:00 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 2326 and n. 1, p. 656.

[40] #3463, Note for the Army Commanders, September 2, 1914, AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 1993, sent to Gallieni September 3 (n. 4, p. 419), along with #3636, Commander-in-Chief to Military Governor of Paris, September 4, 1914, 2:50 a.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 2317.

[41] #3675, Letter, Commander-in-Chief to Sir John French, September 4, [1914], 8:00 a.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 2322; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 379-80; cf. Huguet, Britain and the War, pp. 92-93; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 81-84.

An even more important impediment facing Gallieni on September 4 was the less aggressive attitude adopted at British Headquarters as Murray's influence again began to prevail over that of Wilson. "The Marshal [who] seemed very keen yesterday afternoon on marching east to relieve the left of the Vth Army," came a cryptic message from Huguet at 8:00 a.m. on September 4, "changed his mind last night under the cautious advice given him by his Chief of Staff."[43] Worried about the danger to his right flank, Sir John as a result ordered the BEF, in line with Joffre's previous general instruction, to resume its march to the Seine in three stages after resting on September 4 behind the Marne. Sir John nonetheless held out some hope for an earlier offensive. If the Sixth Army were to attack in the meantime, the British Force would march to its aid, he said, providing his right flank was not endangered.[44]

---

[42] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 4, 1914, p. 90; French to Kitchener, September 7, 1914, HGW (1914), I, Appendix 27, pp. 538-39. Joffre and Gamelin in their accounts claim Berthelot was the chief partisan of attacking south of the Marne in line with his argument for a longer retreat (Joffre, Mémoires, I, 366, 381-82; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 186), but Berthelot wrote, "I managed to have [Joffre] change his decision to attack south of the Marne with the VIth Army," giving as the reasons for the earlier decision the need to support the British. (Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 4, 1914, p. 90.) Joffre himself appears to have been the author of most of the confusion.

[43] Huguet to Staffs of GQG, Vth Army, and Military Governor of Paris, September 4, 1914, 8:00 a.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 2337. By singling out Murray as the source of British caution, Huguet in fact opened the door to French intrigue to get rid of him. See below, Chapter XII, for a treatment of the subject.

[44] Ibid.; Huguet, Britain and the War, pp. 88-89; HGW (1914), I, 275; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 383.

Gallieni, nonetheless, having decided to march immediately into the German flank, attempted to secure British cooperation.[45] On the afternoon of September 4, he journeyed to British Headquarters at Melun, accompanied by Maunoury and Clergerie, his Chief of Staff, but was disappointed to find only Murray present, Sir John having gone to see Haig, and Wilson having left to confer with d'Esperey at Bray-sur-Seine.[46] The Military Governor nonetheless insisted on the need to attack immediately. But Murray departed little from the decision of the previous evening for continued retreat and cautious cooperation. The result of "three hours of conference and discussion" was an accord subject to Sir John's approval which, "in conformity with the instruction of the French General-in-Chief," called for a combined effort against the German Army which had crossed the Marne. But the British Army would retreat behind the Grand Morin to the position of Chanteloup-Mauperthuis on September 5, as already decided, in order to make room for the deployment of Gallieni's Army to the south of the Marne between Lagny and Meaux. Then, as the Paris Army crossed the Marne on the 6th, the British Army would "continue its movement," but pivot on its right to face east on either the 6th or 7th in preparation for a combined action.[47] "I had the impression," wrote Gallieni after his exhausting session with Murray, "that my intentions are not very well understood and that our Allies do not judge the moment opportune for taking up the offensive."[48]

---

[45] Gallieni, Carnets, entry of September 4, 1914, p. 70.

[46] Ibid.; Gallieni, Mémoires, p. 110; French, 1914, p. 107; #648 D/3, Ordre particulier #11, Gallieni to Maunoury, September 4, 1914, 9:10 a.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 2350.

[47] Gallieni, Carnets, entry of September 4, 1914, p. 70; Gallieni, Mémoires, pp. 112-14. "Operation Plan between the English Army and the French Sixth Army Subject to the Approval of Marshal French," September 4, 1914, 4:30 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 2340; cf. #141, Huguet [to GQG], September 4, [1914], 1:50 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 2338.

Gallieni, nevertheless, had obtained a tentative agreement for joint action from the least aggressive member of the British Staff. This, in view of the circumstances, was a most significant achievement. Yet the plan was defective, for it prescribed at least one and possibly two more days of British retreat, thus delaying the British advance by an equal amount. This failing derived, however, not so much from Gallieni's inability to grasp the situation, as Joffre later suggested,[49] as from Joffre's defective instructions which still maintained deployment of the Paris forces south of the Marne as part of a hastened offensive, and, most importantly, from the unwillingness of Murray to commit the British to action in advance of an actual French attack.

While Gallieni was conferring with Murray at Melun, an equally important consultation was taking place between Wilson and d'Esperey at Bray-sur-Seine, halfway between the two Headquarters. The scope of that interview reflected the tortuous decision-making process taking place at GQG that morning, which led to the short term granting of wider initiative to the commanders in the field as Joffre attempted to resolve the strategic conflict at GQG and make up his mind as to the proper course to follow. The "young Turks" of the Third Bureau, sustained by Gamelin and Galbert (Joffre's aides-de-camp), pressed their case once again to Berthelot on the morning of September 4 for hastening the general offensive. The strategic situation in their view was entirely favourable for a flank attack on von Kluck's Army. Although visual evidence of the movement of von Kluck's Army away from Paris to the southeast was confirmed by deciphered German radio messages, Berthelot, the powerful Assistant Chief in charge of operations, turned down the proposal in private discussion with Colonel Pont, head of the Third Bureau, preferring to see von Kluck sink further into the "noose" before attacking. The Third Bureau, however, whose office was next to Joffre's, circumvented the operational head when the Commander-in-Chief appeared, and, with Gamelin as spokesman, presented its case directly to Joffre, who now fully concurred on the merits of an earlier attack.[50] The Third Bureau thus finally gained the upper hand over the senior Staff.

---

[48] Gallieni, Carnets, entry of September 4, 1914, p. 70; Gallieni, Mémoires, p. 114.

[49] See Joffre, Mémoires, I, 383; Conversation of Clergerie [Chief of Staff of Paris Army] with Pellé, September 4, [1914], 9:45 a.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 2351; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 4, 1914, p. 91, which indicates Gallieni's Chief of Staff suggested to GQG that morning that the British, as part of the manoeuvre, fall back all the way to the Seine. There appears no trace of this, however, in Gallieni's discussion with Murray.

Joffre, in fact, had already decided tentatively, on the basis of the British offer, to hasten the offensive, but the state of the Fifth Army was a source of concern to him. He therefore inquired of d'Esperey at Sézanne on September 4 if his Army would be able to march successfully in conjunction with the British and Paris Armies on either September 5 or 6.[51] Appointed but the day previous, d'Esperey, on his own initiative, had already invited Sir John to meet with him that afternoon at Bray, "in order to study positions on the Seine."[52] He was thus able, in response to Joffre's request, to enlarge the scope of his discussions with the British to include the entire question of a coordinated Anglo-French attack on the Marne.

---

[50] See Alexandre, Avec Joffre, pp. 139-41; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 181-84; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 4, 1914, pp. 88-89.

[51] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 4, 1914, pp. 88-89; CT #3704, Commander-in-Chief to Army, Sézanne, September 4, [1914], 12:45 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 2327.

[52] See Tel. message, Vth Army to French Mission at British Headquarters, noon, September 4, 1914, AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 2393 and n. 1, p. 699; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 4, 1914.

The arrangement worked out at Bray reflected the temperament and character of the two principal conferees. Sir John, who had initially agreed to attend the meeting, decided to visit Haig instead and so had sent Wilson, accompanied by Macdonogh, Head of the Intelligence Section. D'Esperey, the fighting French chief, and his willing francophile collaborator, Wilson, saw fully eye to eye on this occasion, Wilson thinking at the end of the interview that the scheme evolved was a good one and might even have been his own idea.[53]

Their agreement, communicated to Joffre during the evening meal, several hours before the results of the Melun conference, called for a general battle on the morning of September 6. On September 5, the Fifth Army would retreat to the line Provins-Sézanne. On condition that the Sixth Army advanced north of the Marne to the Ourcq on the same day, the British Army would halt its retreat and rotate to face east with its left on the Marne at Changis and its right at Coulommiers on the Grand Morin. On September 6 all would attack, the English and Sixth Armies in an easterly direction toward Montmirail and Chateau-Thierry, respectively, and the Fifth Army northward toward Montmirail.[54] But, cautioned d'Esperey, in a separate communication to Joffre, the "close and absolute cooperation" of the Sixth Army on the British left was essential; "otherwise, the English will not march." His own army could fight, he reported, but was not in very good shape, as his three reserve divisions could not be relied upon.[55]

---

[53] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 4, 1914.

[54] Ibid.; Messages of Vth Army to GQG, September 4, 1914, 4:00, 4:45 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), nos. 2398-99, n. 2, p. 704, ns. 1-3, p. 705; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 387.

The plan evolved at Bray, later accepted by Joffre as his own, was a better operational plan than that worked out at Melun. The Sixth Army would be in a much better position to disrupt the enemy flank and rear by attacking on the right bank of the Marne. The Sixth Army, however, would have to assume its position on the Ourcq immediately. Unlike the arrangement worked out at Melun, which envisaged only the advance of the Paris and British Armies, that at Bray envisaged the advance of the entire Allied left in close cooperation. The British Army, being supported on both its right and left, would advance immediately rather than after another day or two of retreat. The one failing of the Bray agreement was that, as usual, Wilson had promised the French more than he was able to deliver. The Melun plan, with all its caution, was (as will be shown) more in harmony with official thinking at British Headquarters. The essential, however, was that in both plans the British had agreed to attack in concert with the French.

Joffre was very well served by his field commanders on September 4. Both d'Esperey and Gallieni demonstrated considerable initiative in attempting to draw up operational plans with the British for a combined attack. As the conflict at GQG led to incoherent instruction and even a call for information from the field, both exercised a substantial latitude of personal decision; d'Esperey, especially, in elaborating with Wilson a full-blown and finely coordinated manoeuvre in reply to Joffre's simple query on the state of his army; Gallieni, to a lesser extent, in making a personal appeal for an immediate attack to the least aggressive but most influential member of the British Staff.

---

[55] Memorandum from d'Esperey to Commander-in-Chief, September 4, 1914, 4:45 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), nos. 2399 and n. 1, p. 705; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 388.

In some respects, the arrangements worked out by both army commanders with the British responded to the German principle of "initiative" which emphasized local cooperation among commanders of similar training. Such local cooperation was necessary to cope with the tactical needs of the situation on the field while evolving an effective strategic plan. True, the differing conceptions of Murray and Wilson and Gallieni's inadequate instructions resulted in somewhat differing plans which would have to be adjusted, but in both cases, the British had agreed to march with the French: that was the essential. The capacity of British Staff officers to work effectively hand in hand with French army commanders was a new and wholesome development which augured well for the proposed joint action. Without the substantial improvement in relations between the British Command and the French field commanders, cooperation of that quality would not have been possible. And without renewed cooperation in the field, it is doubtful that the Allies would have been able to put together a plan capable of exploiting the favourable strategic situation offered by von Kluck's march to the southeast of Paris.

Joffre's Decision to Attack

The decision-making process at French Headquarters proceeded in "fits and starts." From the evening of September 3 until some twenty-four hours later, when at 10:00 p.m. on September 4, the famous General Order No. 6 ordering the offensive on the Marne was signed, Joffre ruminated the decision and its terms.[56] His final decision to attack, just as his initiative to prepare the attack, was taken with strict regard to the perceived British attitude. In the "restless atmosphere" which prevailed at *GQG* in the afternoon of September 4, as Joffre "anxiously awaited a reply" from d'Esperey, the following encouraging message was received from Huguet:[57]

---

[56] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 385.

> [The] Marshal, informed by general Gallieni of [the] decision to advance [the] VIth Army to [the] east, replied that [he] would remain as requested on his current position south [of the] Marne as long as possible, ready to cooperate with either [the] Fifth or Sixth Army or with both as [the] situation may demand.[58]

This telegram, which was really a delayed report on the exchange of messages between Gallieni and Sir John of that morning prior to the former's visit to Melun, Joffre mistook for the result of the Melun meeting. That communication, reflecting, possibly at Wilson's instance, a more willing attitude on the part of the British than the message received earlier in the day which announced the decision for renewed retreat on September 5, "greatly influenced" Joffre's decision.[59] Not waiting for d'Esperey's reply, he called a new meeting of Berthelot, Belin, Pellé, Pont and his personal aides, Gamelin, Galbert and Muller, sometime after 3:00 p.m. and after renewed discussion announced his decision to attack.[60] Indicative of who had won in the strategic debate at French Headquarters, Gamelin, who was in close association with the Third Bureau, rather than Berthelot, was charged with drawing up the orders.[61]

---

[57] Berthelot, *Diary*, I, entry of September 4, 1914, p. 192.

[58] CT #141, Huguet [to *GQG*], 4/9 [1914], 1:30 p.m., *AFGG*, I(II) A(II), no. 2338; Wilson Diaries, V, *IWM*, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 4, 1914; cf. Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 385.

[59] Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 385; see Wilson Diaries, V, *IWM*, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 4, 1914.

[60] Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 385-86; Gamelin, *Manoeuvre*, p. 188; Berthelot, *Diary*, I, entry of September 4, 1914, p. 89. Joffre gives the time as about 4:00 p.m.; Berthelot, "about 3:00 p.m."

[61] See Gamelin, *Manoeuvre*, p. 188; Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 386.

Nevertheless, initially the date for the attack was not set for September 6, as the Third Bureau wished, but for September 7, largely as a result of Berthelot's numerous objections to attacking prematurely. Time, he argued, would be required to deploy French troops for attack, and for the IVth Corps to arrive in Paris; Maunoury's attack would be more decisive if von Kluck were allowed to proceed further south; and time would be required in dealing with the British, as "it was absolutely essential to halt the English before they reached the south bank of the Seine, and to persuade them to attack with us, without reservation." To all these considerations Joffre acceded, and the attack was consequently postponed by a day.[62] Consideration of the British thus played a significant role also in determining the initial date of attack.

The battle plan adopted was but a slight variation of the Bray agreement worked out between Wilson and d'Esperey. GQG had by now accepted the strategic merits of Gallieni's attacking on the right bank of the Marne,[63] and Joffre was so pleased with the Bray accord, which promised immediate British participation on condition of a prompt advance by Gallieni north of the Marne, that he instructed Gamelin to make it the basis of his own orders.[64] Little modification was required. The final orders retained all of the Bray arrangement, except that the Fifth Army's left was to retreat less and draw somewhat closer to the British on September 5 and instructions were drafted for the attack of Foch's recently formed Ninth Army on the Fifth Army's right.[65]

---

[62] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 4, 1914, pp. 89-90; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 386; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 188. Berthelot claims the date was set for the 6th. (Ibid.)

[63] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 4, 1914, p. 90.

[64] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 388-89; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 89-90. According to Gamelin, the ideas worked out at GQG were very similar to the Bray plan. (Ibid., p. 190, n. 3.)

The date for the attack was then advanced to September 6 as a result of Gallieni's intervention. Both Foch and d'Esperey had indicated their readiness to attack on the 6th, facilitating the earlier date.[66] But no change was made until after Gallieni had called on the telephone in the evening of September 4 and insisted on personally speaking with Joffre, his former subordinate in Madagascar.[67] Exercising considerable intellectual authority over his former subordinate, Gallieni at once informed Joffre of his own orders (although these were not sent until after the conversation) for the advance the next day of the Paris Army on the right bank of the Marne.[68] Joffre, who feared the telephone because it obliged him to speak without adequate reflection and had taken the precaution of having Belin accompany him into the telephone booth,[69] might have countermanded, delayed or altered Gallieni's orders had he had any strong objection. But *GQG* had just decided upon a manoeuvre which called for such an advance. Joffre therefore raised no objection; indeed, he reassured the Military Governor that his attack would fit into the overall offensive. The English, he affirmed, would also attack.[70]

---

[65] Cf. [d'Esperey to *GQG*], 4 September, 1914, 4:00 and 4:45 p.m. *AFGG*, I(II) A(II), nos. 2398-99; CT #6126, Commander Vth Army to *GQG*, September 4, 1914, 8:15 p.m., *AFGG*, I(II) A(II), no. 2401 with CT #3795, General Order No. 6, September 4, 1914, 10:00 p.m., *AFGG*, I(II) A(II), no. 2332.

[66] Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 387-89.

[67] *Ibid.*, p. 389; Gamelin, *Manoeuvre*, p. 192; Gallieni, *Carnets*, entry of September 4, 1914, pp. 70-71; cf. Lyautey, *Gallieni*, pp. 247-48.

[68] Gallieni, *Carnets*, entry of September 4, 1914, p. 71; Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 389; Gallieni, *Mémoires*, p. 120. These are the only three eyewitness accounts of this conversation. There is a surprising agreement between Joffre's *Mémoires* and Gallieni's *Carnets*, but the latter's *Mémoires* appear to editorialize.

[69] See Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 389.

Only after the conversation did the slow-witted Joffre realize, by his own account, that the advance of Gallieni's Army on September 5 would bring it into contact with the enemy the same day. To prevent premature disclosure to the enemy of the overall manoeuvre, he then decided, rather than countermand Gallieni's attack, to advance the date of the offensive to the morning of September 6.[71] Although Gallieni had the upper hand intellectually in his conversation with Joffre, it is clear that Joffre must nonetheless bear full responsibility for the decision to attack on the 6th in view of the options still available.

In his Mémoires, Joffre lauded the boldness of d'Esperey in signifying his willingness to march on September 6 and his initiative in working out an accord with Wilson. "It is he who made possible the battle of the Marne," he wrote retrospectively in high praise of the new Commander.[72] On the other hand, Joffre reserved nothing but criticism for Gallieni, the chief competitor for his post as Commander-in-Chief, who he claimed forced his hand to advance the date of the offensive and thus caused it to produce less than maximum results.[73] It apparently escaped Joffre's attention that the two assessments were incompatible, for the excellent plan drawn up by d'Esperey and Wilson was tailored specifically for attack on the morning of the 6th. Had the attack been delayed a day, a new arrangement would have had to be worked out with the British, one which would have been all the more difficult, as the British line of retreat west and the Fifth Army movement south further widened the gap between them which von Kluck continued to exploit.

---

[70] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 389; Gallieni, Carnets, entry of September 4, 1914, p. 71.

[71] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 389; cf. Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 192.

[72] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 388.

[73] Ibid., pp. 389-90. Berthelot apparently convinced Joffre of this on subsequent days. See Berthelot, Diary, I, entries of September 4, 5, 8, 1914, pp. 89-91, 94, 104.

Nor is the strategic argument convincing. While the delay of a further day might have accentuated Gallieni's flank attack (had von Kluck continued his forward march) and thus changed the result of the manoeuvre from that of a pierced centre to a rolled-up flank, with perhaps slightly more effect, it is doubtful, given the German capacity for manoeuvre, that the results would have been disastrous for them. Retreat to the safety of a defensive line would probably have resulted in either case. Joffre, moreover, had not been forced by the wily Military Governor to attack on the 6th, as the latter was under his command and had given no irreversible orders. Joffre, in fact, assented to the attack on September 6 of his own volition and ought to have been grateful to Gallieni for having persuaded him, by whatever means, to have done so.

The Melun Meeting, September 5, 1914

Meanwhile, on the evening of September 4, just as Joffre had issued the order to attack, the will to fight at British Headquarters took a decided "nosedive." Even before Sir John's return in the evening, Murray had ordered a retreat for the 5th to the Ozoir-la-Ferrière-Ormeaux line,[74] about six and a half miles behind the Chanteloup-Mauperthuis line agreed upon with Gallieni. The motivation for that retreat lay not entirely in the need to make room for the Sixth Army south of the Marne, as the British professed the next morning,[75] but more decidedly in the crossing of the Marne by some three and a half German corps during the day and the consequent danger to the British right flank.[76] Upon his return Sir John fully endorsed Murray's decision, having already ordered Haig in the afternoon to retreat rather than engage German cavalry at Doue on his right rear flank. By evening German cavalry had penetrated all the way to Coulommiers, far to the rear of Sir John's right wing.[77] The Fifth Army's left, moreover, had also retreated to elude the danger to its flank.[78] The new plan thus hung by a thread, as the difficulty of dealing with the circumstances on the battlefield once again threatened to upset the new French strategy.

---

[74] CT #144, Huguet to Military Governor of Paris, 4/9 [1914], 6:30 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 2341.

Sir John, as a result, was ill-disposed toward even the cautious agreement for a combined offensive worked out between Murray and Gallieni at Melun. To French Headquarters and the commanders on either side of him he wired his partial acceptance of the arrangement. He would retreat south of the Marne on the 5th and 6th as agreed, but would "prefer because of continual changes in the situation to study it again before deciding on future operations."[79] The question of a combined

---

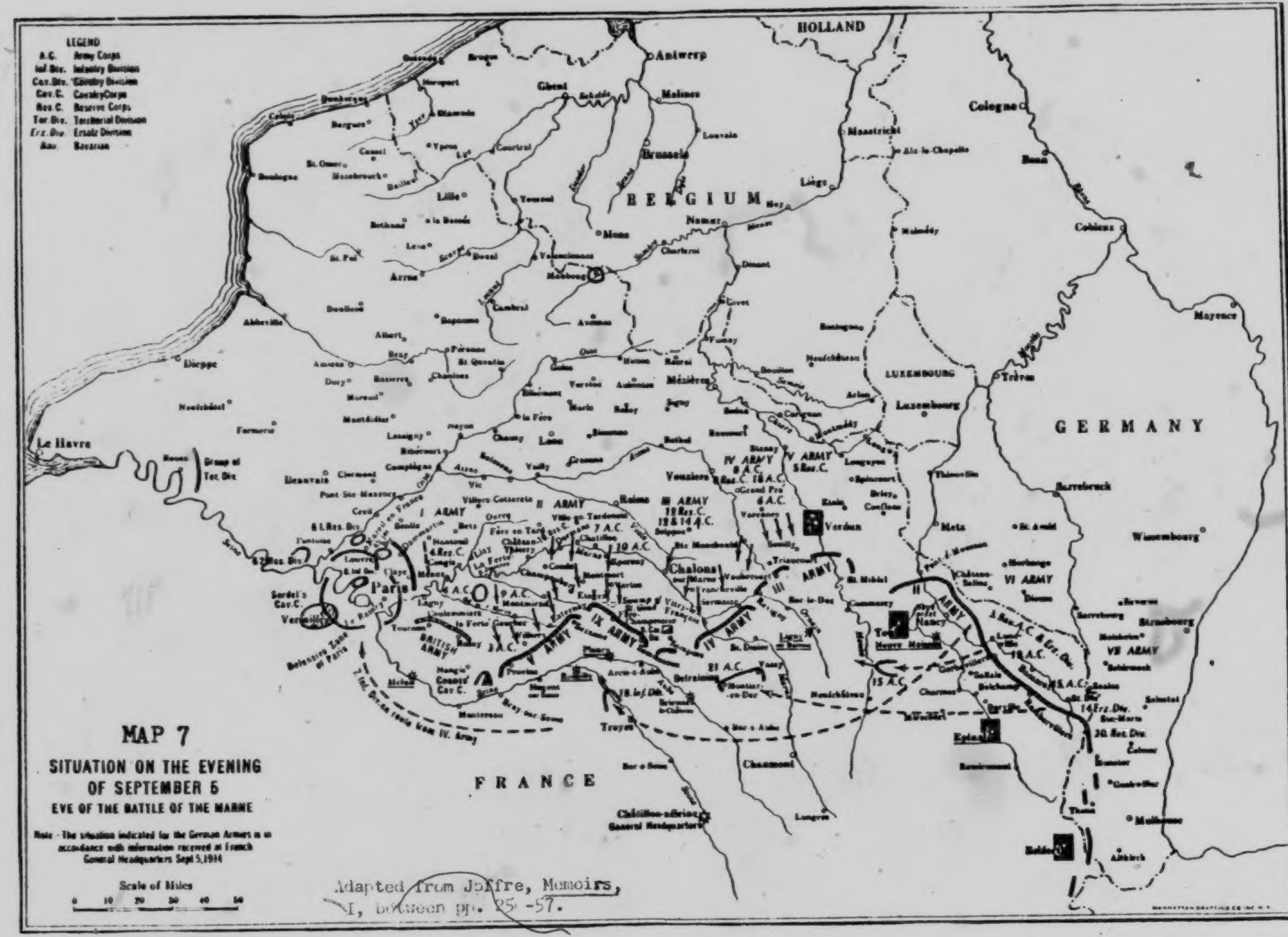
[75] Huguet [to GQG, Vth Army] and Military Governor of Paris, September 5, 1914, 11:00 a.m.; Huguet to Military Governor of Paris, September 5, 1914, 11:00 a.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), nos. 2482, 2481; French to Kitchener, September 7, 1914, HGW (1914), I, Appendix 27, pp. 538-39. Cf. Huguet, Britain and the War, p. 93.

[76] "Operation Order no. 16," 4 September, 1914, 6:35 p.m., HGW (1914), I, Appendix 28, pp. 540-41.

[77] HGW (1914), I, 276-77; Huguet, Britain and the War, p. 93; "Location of the VIth and Vth Armies and of the British Armies at nightfall, September 4, 1914," AFGG, I(II), Map #62.

[78] HGW (1914), I, 277.

[79] CT, Huguet to Military Governor of Paris, [GQG and VIth Army], September 4, 1914, 7:30 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 2343; cf. Huguet,


LEGEND
A.C. Army Corps
Inf. Div. Infantry Division
Cav. Div. Cavalry Division
Cav. C. Cavalry Corps
Res. C. Reserve Corps
Ter. Div. Territorial Division
Erz. Div. Ersatz Division
Bav. Bavarian
HOLLAND
BELGIUM
LUXEMBOURG
GERMANY
FRANCE
Antwerp
Ghent
Brussels
Liège
Namur
Maastricht
Aix-la-Chapelle
Cologne
Bonn
Coblenz
Mayence
Trèves
Luxembourg
Lille
Arras
Dieppe
Le Havre
Paris
Reims
Verdun
Chalons
Metz
Toul
Nancy
Épinal
Belfort
Troyes
Châtillon-sur-Seine
General Headquarters
I ARMY
II ARMY
III ARMY
IV ARMY
V ARMY
VI ARMY
VII ARMY
IX ARMY
BRITISH ARMY
Defensive Zone of Paris
7 Inf. Div. en route from IV. Army
Group of Ter. Div.
Sordet's Cav. C.
Conneau Cav. C.
Scale of Miles
0
10
20
30
40
50

MAP 7

SITUATION ON THE EVENING
OF SEPTEMBER 5
EVE OF THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE

Note - The situation indicated for the German Armies is in accordance with information received at French General Headquarters Sept 5, 1914

Adapted from Joffre, Memoirs,
I, between pp. 25-57.

offensive was thus adjourned until further study. To Wilson, who returned shortly thereafter from working out an arrangement with d'Esperey at Bray for an immediate Allied advance, Sir John's decision for renewed retreat "was simply heartbreaking."[80]

Nurtured on Wilsonian optimism in the early evening, Joffre learned belatedly, only after 10:00 p.m. on September 4, of the dominant tendency at British Headquarters. Hardly had he signed General Order No. 6 when the results of the Melun Conference arrived, confirming the impression of British caution and reluctance to march conveyed by Gallieni earlier on the telephone. Word then arrived of Sir John's wish to study the situation further before deciding to attack.[81]

The new crisis in Allied relations required immediate, decisive action if the one last chance for success were to be salvaged from the ever-changing course of Allied military relations. On the supposition that the "very understanding" Wilson had made promises at Bray which Sir John later failed to accept and that the differing results of the Melun and Bray conferences were back of the misunderstanding, Joffre, energetic chief that he was, moved at once to clarify the situation.[82] A preliminary message to British Headquarters indicating French ac-

---

Britain and the War, p. 93.

[80] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 4, 1914.

[81] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 390-91; "Operational plan of the English Army and the French VIth Army subject to the approval of Marshal French," September 4, 1914, 4:30 p.m. [arrived at GQG just before 10:00 p.m.], AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 2340 and n. 2, p. 664; Tel. message #3796, Brécard, Liaison Officer to French Mission at British Headquarters, to Huguet, September 4, 1914, 10:00 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 2333 and n. 2, p. 661; CT, Huguet to Military Governor of Paris, [GQG and VIth Army], September 4, 1914, 7:30 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 2343.

[82] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 390-91; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 4, 1914, p. 91.

ceptance of the British role in either plan was followed by a telegram of General Order No. 6 which set forth the British role in the overall offensive plan. Captain Galbert, one of Joffre's trusted aides, who carried a duplicate copy of the order to Melun in the night, was further charged with the important mission of explaining to Sir John the urgent necessity of conforming to the French plan.[83]

Although Galbert was unable to see anyone but Huguet,[84] receipt of Joffre's order for a combined offensive was sufficient to rally British support. Wilson received General Order No. 6 from Huguet at 3:00 a.m. "I spent a miserable night," he reported, "because we have already had one day's retirement & because I thought Sir John would go on retiring." "However, I went to see him at 7 a.m. & he has agreed to retrace his steps & join in the offensive movement of the 5th and 6th Armies."[85]

Sir John, of course, had little choice, for, despite his reservations of the previous evening, he was now faced with a clearcut battle plan from Joffre involving the coordinated advance of the entire Allied left. Kitchener's formal instructions to coordinate with the movements of the French Army were thereby activated, and as both flanks were supported by French attacks, no excuse could be made.

Sir John thus agreed on September 5 to move forward in accordance with Joffre's general orders. But, because of the British retreat of some twelve miles during the night, "to make room," as was claimed, "for the VIth Army's debouchment south of the Marne," the British would not reach the Changis-Coulommiers position as provided in the directive.[86] After a consultation with Maunoury, who arrived at British Headquarters at 9:00 a.m. to coordinate plans, it was decided, under the cautious advice of Murray, to rotate each British corps to face eastward, but not to advance significantly from the Ozoir-la-Ferrière-Ormeaux line attained in the night. Sir John, said a report, wished to remain slightly behind the Sixth Army and to engage only after the latter crossed the Ourcq.[87]

---

[83] Tel. message #3796, Brécard to Huguet, September 4, 1914, 10:00 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 2333 and n. 2, p. 661; CT #3795, General Order No. 6, September 4, 1914, 10:00 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 2332; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 4, 1914, p. 92; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 391.

[84] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 392.

[85] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 5, 1914.

Meanwhile, Joffre was gravely concerned early on the morning of September 5 lest the British refuse their participation. "The uncertainty which prevailed at this critical moment was particularly agonizing," he later wrote. "I felt I must obtain the cooperation of their army at any price. If it were refused me, I saw the victory I anticipated slip from my grasp."[88] The British had, in fact, become the one most fundamental element in French strategic planning, their participation being the least certain.

The situation called for the most energetic measures. Joffre therefore used every avenue of persuasion available to him. His first step was to make a new and more urgent appeal to the French Government for diplomatic intervention. As Kitchener had recently expressed his solidarity with the French in a private telegram to Joffre,[89] an energetic British response could be relied upon. Taking Millerand into full confidence on the decisive attack about to take place, Joffre devoted several paragraphs to the necessity for full and unstinted British participation in the offensive. As a result of the interviews of the previous day, he observed, a question mark still hung over the British taking part, despite Sir John's pledge of energetic support. "I count on your drawing to the Marshal's attention, through the diplomatic channel, the decisive importance of a whole-hearted offensive," he wrote. "If I could give orders to the British Army as I would to a French Army occupying the same positions," he concluded, "I would launch an immediate attack."[90]

---

[86] Tel. message from Melun, September 4, [1914], at 9:15 a.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 2480; cf. French to Kitchener, September 7, 1914, HGW (1914), I, Appendix 27, pp. 538-39.

[87] Huguet to [GQG, Vth Army and] Military Governor of Paris, September 5, 1914, 11:00 a.m., and Huguet to Military Governor of Paris, September 5, 1914, 11:00 a.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), nos. 2482, 2481; Huguet, Britain and the War, pp. 95-96.

[88] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 391.

The next step was to make a personal appeal to Sir John at Melun. Joffre had spoken the previous afternoon of visiting Sir John personally,[91] and Galbert's return at 9:30 a.m. with a pessimistic report on British frame of mind and a plea for Joffre's personal intervention seemed to make his visit all the more imperative, despite news arriving at the same time of British acceptance of the offensive plan.[92]

In his Mémoires, Joffre claims the Melun meeting with Sir John was altogether decisive in obtaining British participation in the Marne offensive.[93] He failed to mention that the French Command was fully informed of the British decision to march prior to arranging this visit, which was, as stated, "to personally thank the Marshal for the decision he has taken."[94] But, given the hesitations of the British and the changeable nature of French planning the meeting was very important in binding the British to this final French plan of attack upon which the French staked their entire future. British resolve to march and to give full support to the offensive were thereby strengthened and a bond of solidarity between commands was forged at this dramatic encounter.

---

[89] Arthur, Kitchener, III, 56, n. 1.

[90] CT #3845, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, (Personal), September 5, 1914, 9:00 a.m., AG, 16N1905, GQG, EM, 3rd Bur., dos: "Comptes rendus au ministre de: 29 août 1914 au 14 octobre 1914," (reproduced in AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 2468; see Joffre, Mémoires, I, 392. See below for the results of this appeal.

[91] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 4, 1914, p. 90.

[92] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 393-94; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 199; Tel. messages from French Mission at British HQ to Brécard, September 4, [1914], 9:15 a.m., Brécard to French Mission at British HQ, September 5, 1914, 9:50 a.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), nos. 2480, 2469.

Accompanied by Muller, Gamelin, Clive and an officer of the Third Bureau, Joffre journeyed on September 5 to the beautiful Vaux-le-Pénil castle, British Headquarters at Melun, where at 2:00 p.m. he met Sir John flanked by Murray, Wilson, Huguet and Spears. Everyone stood, on this auspicious occasion, as the little room in which they met contained a great table but no chairs.[95] Joffre's purpose was to "put before everyone the necessity of an attack 'to the last man.'"[96] Putting his "whole soul into convincing the Marshal,"[97] he at once made it clear that [all the] French Armies are going to attack tomorrow."[98] Setting forth the favourable strategic situation, he "urged the necessity of vigourous action." "'The situation would be very grave,'" he said, "if the general advance failed."[99] "'The lives of all French people, the soil of France & the future of Europe,'" he exclaimed, "depended on the coming battle."[100] "'Je vous en supplie, mon général,'" he said, "spreading out his hands & bowing,"[101] as "he begged Sir John to cooperate with all his might."[102] "And Sir John replied, 'General, I understand perfectly. I am ready. My men are ready. I will do everything that is possible.'"[103]

---

[93] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 393-94.

[94] Ibid.; But see Tel. messages: from French Mission at British HQ to Brécard, September 4, [1914], 9:15 a.m.; Brécard to French Mission at British HQ, September 5, 1914, 9:50 a.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), nos. 2480, 2469; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 199.

[95] For accounts of this meeting, see Joffre, Mémoires, I, 393-94; Spears, Liaison, pp. 413-16, 418, who indicates another French officer was present; Huguet, Britain and the War, p. 98; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 198-99; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, reproduced in Callwell, Wilson, I, 174; Clive Diaries, II/I, KCMA, entry of September 5, 1914. My treatment is based largely on the latter two accounts which were written at the time and are remarkably similar.

[96] Clive Diaries, II/I, KCMA, entry of September 5, 1914.

[97] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 393.

That verbal pledge, translated by Wilson as "The Marshal has said yes," sealed the arrangement. The great retreat had come to an end. "We got out orders at once for a movement to the East with a view to attacking the enemy tomorrow," wrote Wilson, summarizing the results of the meeting.[104] The Allied offensive was about to begin and full British participation was assured.

---

[98] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 5, 1914.

[99] Clive Diaries, II/I, KCMA, entry of September 5, 1914.

[100] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 5, 1914; cf. Clive Diaries, II/I, KCMA, entry of September 5, 1914.

[101] Clive Diaries, II/I, KCMA, entry of September 5, 1914.

[102] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 5, 1914. Joffre and Gamelin claimed that Joffre banged his fist on the table at this point and said, "British honour is at stake" (Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 199-200; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 394), but the accounts written at the time giving no mention of this are probably more reliable.

[103] Clive Diaries, II/I, KCMA, entry of September 5, 1914. Cf. Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 5, 1914.

[104] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 394; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 5, 1914.

. . .

Thus ended one of the great sagas of military misunderstanding. The change of circumstance in Allied military relations had indeed been dramatic since August 30, when the French Command had no plan but to retreat before the German advance, Sir John had decided to drop out of the line, and cooperation in the field had virtually ceased. Fortunately for the future of the campaign, the situation on the field soon changed dramatically in French favour, the British Government obliged Sir John to stay in the line, and effective cooperation in the field was restored by the appointment of new French field commanders capable of working together with the British. The happy nexus of these three factors gave rise to the British offer to march into the German flank on September 3, which provided the immediate stimulus for French preparation of the Battle of the Marne.

In assessing Joffre's role in the preparation of the Marne offensive, full credit must be given to him and his Command for the strategic manoeuvre, developing out of his earlier Aisne plan, which provided vast numerical superiority on the Allied left.[105] Between August 25 and September 6, a total of 11 active, 5 reserve and 3 cavalry divisions were inserted into the line west of Verdun by the French Command. Brought by rail from the right wing, the interior and the colonies, this strength went largely into the creation of the new Sixth Army on the far left which ultimately consisted of 4 active and 5 reserve divisions, and the Ninth Army on d'Esperey's right, consisting of 6 active and 2 reserve divisions.[106] The British also increased their strength by a division. The

---

[105] Cf. Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 10-11ff. P. Lyet, "La Marne," Revue historique de l'Armée, XX (1964), 87-88.

[106] From data given by Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 79-80, 169-70;

German First and Second Armies, whose march had led them away from Paris, were thus confronted on September 6 by three and a half Allied armies; two on von Kluck's right flank, with a massive superiority of approximately 31½ infantry and 7 cavalry divisions to 18 German divisions of infantry and 5 divisions of cavalry.[107]

French day-to-day direction of the military coalition, however, was not brilliant. After the lost "Battle of the Frontiers," Joffre regroped for solutions, and the fact was painfully reflected in his relationship with Sir John, to whom he sent inconsistent and incoherent directives. The British, moreover, were unduly blamed for lack of support of the Fifth Army flank. A novice in military diplomacy, Joffre confided his plans to the British only after being instructed by Millerand to establish a more confiding relationship with them. He nevertheless recognized the strains caused by Lanrezac in the trouble with Sir John, and by replacing him with d'Esperey paved the way for better understanding in the field. He also sought decisive diplomatic support when needed.

On strategic matters, an intense power struggle was waged between Berthelot and the Third Bureau on the proper moment to attack. Ultimately, the opinions of the field commanders were called upon to decide the issue and its terms, which also accounts for the less authori-

---

After successive manipulations, the Fifth Army, with two reserve divisions less, and the Fourth and Third Armies, with a combined strength of one active division more, remained at essentially the same strength. (See Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 79-80, 169-70.)

[107] Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 169-70; "Movement of large units effected between August 25 and September 7, 1914," AFGG, I(III), Map #2; "Location of the IX Army September 6 at dawn and evening," AFGG, I(III), Map #34. The German X Army Corps and the Guard Corps were opposed by 4 divisions in Foch's Army. (Ibid.)

tarian hold of GQG on the direction of the campaign on September 4, and the widened scope for local initiative. While Joffre derived the maximum benefit from an ecclectic and "fully-ripened" decision-making process, overall direction nonetheless suffered. Just as the conflict at British Headquarters was reflected in a zigzag course and changing intentions from hour to hour, so the directives emanating from GQG on September 4 lacked unity and direction. The wider latitude given the field commanders in dealing with the British, however, allowed them to work out plans which formed the basis of the Marne manoeuvre. But it was Joffre who finally sealed the arrangement with the British by his energetic appeal to Sir John at Melun on September 5. A fortuitous balance was thus struck between local coordination and general direction, with rather favourable results.

But it was not so much Gallieni's urging on September 4 as the expression on September 3 of British willingness to attack von Kluck's flank which led Joffre to consider acceleration of his Seine plan and a strategic reversal in the valley of the Marne. Further word received on September 4 of British willingness to remain on the Marne and fight with either or both adjoining armies led Joffre to decide the attack, without learning of the state of his own Fifth Army. Time necessary to get a firm commitment from the British was a consideration in his decision to delay the attack to the 7th; then, after the Bray accord, when immediate British participation seemed possible, the further decision was made, under pressure from Gallieni, to advance the date a day. Finally, the operational plan worked out by Wilson and d'Esperey was virtually taken over by GQG in large measure, because it promised full British participation, and served as the basis of the General Order to attack.

At every stage of the decision-making process, utmost consideration was thus given to obtaining full British participation. In the hope of gaining full British participation, which Joffre considered essential for success, great flexibility was shown in French planning. French strategy on the western front was, in fact, to a much greater extent than generally believed framed around considerations of British participation.

While the French Command carefully considered British potential at every stage in its planning, no serious attempt was made to involve the British in the decision-making process. The nearest to British involvement came with Wilson's trip to GQG on August 29 to argue in favour of a flank manoeuvre, and in his later plan drawn up with d'Esperey at Bray. The French Command wished full British participation, but was not prepared to pay the price, in any significant way, of British involvement in the decision-making process. Leadership was to remain a French prerogative. The British would be asked to make a maximum contribution, but always within the confines of French strategic planning.

CHAPTER VIII

MARCHING: THE MARNE AND THE AISNE

SEPTEMBER 6 - 23, 1914

Compared with the grave difficulties experienced in Anglo-French coordination during the "Great Retreat," coordination during the Battle of the Marne was a relatively simple matter, and appears uneventful, almost an epilogue to the earlier problems. The British had committed themselves at Melun to march according to the French plan. Sandwiched between two French armies, Sir John found it necessary to ask for personal instructions from Joffre on September 6, and then practiced voluntary subordination as he attempted to implement French directives. Joffre, moreover, anxious to gain full British support, was particularly careful to give the utmost support to Sir John on his flanks, to assure close communication between Gallieni, d'Esperey and the British Command, and to publicly praise the valiant efforts of the British Army. The results were harmonious British participation in the battle under the leadership of the French Command.

Although the French were not entirely satisfied with the cautious initial advance of the BEF, genuine understanding soon developed between the two commands as the combined offensive became more and more successful after the British crossing of the Marne on September 9. Despite the lack of a well-defined arrangement between Commands, an acceptable level of tactical coordination was thus achieved for a short time by mutual commitment to a common goal, careful personal relations, and success on the field of battle.

Consolidation of Good Will on the Marne

The legacy of ill-will nonetheless persisted midway into the Marne offensive. Although the British began their march eastward with but slight delay on the morning of September 6 in conjunction with the general offensive of the French Armies as agreed,[1] Gallieni, still suspicious of British intentions, doubted that they really meant to attack. The Sixth Army having engaged the sole German corps (IV Reserve) north of the Marne on the previous evening, Gallieni was concerned lest dilatory British action allow the German II Corps facing the BEF to be diverted to his front. When French surveillance confirmed the movement of this Corps northward on the morning of the 6th, he vigourously pressed Sir John to fully engage, "conforming to the directive of General Joffre," so that his own action would not be isolated.[2]

In response to Gallieni's goading, Sir John, largely as a rebuke to Gallieni, requested personal instructions from Joffre.[3] Although Gallieni on his own initiative had obligingly ordered a division south of the Marne on the 6th, in response to British request for support on their left flank,[4] Sir John resented his exhortation to march and refused to take instruction from him.[5] The events of the day moreover illustrated all too clearly the need for overall direction. Sir John and Murray's alignment of the BEF to face north on the Grand Morin failed to satisfy d'Esperey, who, supported by Wilson, repeatedly demanded that the British face more to the east, in order to take the German columns in front of the Fifth Army in the flank.[6] For the British Army, sandwiched between two French armies with competing needs, centralized guidance was highly desirable if the British advance was to be effective.

---

[1] #169, Huguet to [Vth and VIth] Armies, September 5, 1914, 7:00 p.m., AFGG, I(III) A(I), no. 2483; Tel. message #137, [French Mission at British Headquarters to VI Army], [6 September, 1914], 11h30, AFGG, I(III) A(I), no. 238; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 6, 1914.

[2] #6795, Gallieni to Huguet, September 6, [1914], noon, AFGG, I(III) A(I), no. 251. See Tel. message #177/D, Huguet to GQG, Vth, VIth Armies, September 6, 1914, 12:20 p.m., AFGG, I(III) A(I), no. 240.

[3] Tel. message, from French Mission at British HQ to VIth Army, 6/9 [1914] at 6:45 p.m., AFGG, I(III) A(I), no. 243 and n. 2, p. 204; French, 1914, p. 121.

[4] #179, Huguet to Commander, VIth Army, September 6, 1914, 11h30,

On the evening of the 6th, *GQG* learned from a liaison officer of Sir John's irritation at being reproached for "not acting with enough vigour."[7] In order to assure full British cooperation, Joffre had already given instructions earlier in the evening to Maunoury (a copy of which was sent to the British) to maintain constant contact with Sir John, to grant his requests as much as possible, and in particular to give full support to his left flank.[8] D'Esperey had also been instructed

---

AFGG, I(III) A(I), no. 238; T 73/AH, 99/A, Major Armbruster [to Huguet] from VIth Army, September 6, [1914], 12:45 p.m., 4:30 p.m. and Tel. message, Armbruster to Huguet, 6:00 p.m., *AFGG*, I(III) A(I), nos. 245-47 and n. 2, p. 205, ns. 1-3, p. 206.

[5] See Tel. message from French Mission at British HQ to VIth Army, 6/9 [1914], at 6:45 p.m., *AFGG*, I(III) A(I), no. 243 and n.2, p.204.

[6] #5/3, 6/3, Letters, d'Esperey to French, September 6, [1914], 2:00 p.m., 7:00 p.m.; #7/3, Note [from Vth Army] to French Mission at British HQ, 6/9 [1914], 9:00 p.m., *AFGG*, I(III) A(I), nos. 339, 342, 343; Wilson Diaries, V, *IWM*, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 6, 1914. Cf. C. Vidal, "L'Armée Britannique à la Bataille de la Marne," *Revue d'histoire de la Guerre Mondiale*, XVI (1936), 358 and n. 1.

[7] Berthelot, *Diary*, I, entry of September 7, 1914, p. 98; see "Complementary note relative to the role of the English Army," September 7, 1914, *AFGG*, I(III) A(I), no. 769.

[8] T. #4039, Commander-in-Chief to [VIth Army], September 6, 1914, 6:00 p.m., arrived September 7, 1914, at 3:00 a.m., *AFGG*, I(III) A(I),

to maintain close liaison with the British.[9] But further action would now be required to soothe British feelings.

Varying opinions existed at GQG on the efficacy of the British advance on the first day of the offensive. Much like Gallieni, the anglophobic Berthelot was of the opinion that the British "had still continued to retreat yesterday, despite all the promises made, lost time getting into line and realized only belatedly that [they] had little before them ." As a result, they had approached the south bank of the Grand Morin only in the evening. The sluggish advance of the British had thus allowed the enemy to withdraw his corps from their front in order to throw it against Maunoury.[10] While correct in his strategic analysis,[11] Berthelot was unfair in his assessment of the reasons for British delay and failed to report that the British had, in fact, crossed the Aubetin in advance of the left of d'Esperey's Army.[12] Heavily engaged all day, despite his orders to attack vigourously only when the "action of the English Army" could be felt,[13] d'Esperey was

---

no. 226 and n. 1, p. 195; Tel. message #4049, Commander-in-Chief to Huguet, September 6, 1914, AFGG, I(III) A(I), no. 227.

[9] Information Bulletin, September 5, 1914, AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 2530.

[10] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 6, 1914, p. 97; cf. Gallieni, Mémoires, pp. 79-80, who further faults the British for taking two and a half days to cover the 20 kilometres between the Grand Morin and the Marne, while, in the meantime, Maunoury had to face alone the three German corps on his front.

[11] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 6, 1914; Vidal, "L'Armée Britannique à la Bataille de la Marne," pp.355-56.

[12] See Huguet to Commander-in-Chief, September 6, 1914, 5:30 p.m. (arrived 7-9-14, 8:55 a.m.), AFGG, I(III) A(I), no. 242; cf. "Location of the French Armies, September 6, 1914, (evening)," AFGG, I(III), Map #3; Vidal, "L'Armée Britannique à la Bataille de la Marne," pp. 354-57, 360; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 403.

[13] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 6,1914;

thus assisted on his left by the British advance of 12 kilometres, which finally closed the gap between the two Armies.[14]

Joffre was prepared to accept the more flattering view of British contribution. In a very friendly letter to Sir John, aimed at obtaining increased British effort,[15] he thanked him for his advance eastward, which he said had resulted in the successful march of the Fifth Army. Continuation of the British attack, he said, urging the British onward, would greatly facilitate the attack of the Fifth Army the next day. But the British should direct their advance slightly more to the north, he advised, to give more support to the Sixth Army.[16]

The pattern, established on September 6-7, was followed throughout the Marne offensive. In line with Sir John's request, further instructions followed the next morning and every day thereafter, setting the objectives and zones of the British Army in the overall Allied offensive. With these Sir John readily complied.[17] The question of coor-

---

French, 1914, p. 121; Information Bulletin, [September 5, 1914], AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 2530.

[14] See Vidal, "L'Armée Britannique à la Bataille de la Marne," pp. 355-56, 360; "Location of the French Armies, September 6, 1914, (evening)," AFGG, I(III), Map #3; #4065 bis, Commander-in-Chief to Marshal commanding British forces, September 6, 1914, 9:00 p.m., AFGG, I(III) A(I), no. 231.

[15] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 7, 1914, p. 98.

[16] #4065 bis, Commander-in-Chief to Marshal commanding British Forces, September 6, 1914, 9:00 p.m., AFGG, I(III) A(III), no. 231; French, 1914, p. 121.

[17] "Complementary note relative to the role of the English Army," (given to English Army on the morning of September 7 following conversation of Serret [of Third Bureau on liaison to the British] with Berthelot at Chatillon-sur-Seine on the night of September 6-7), AFGG, I(III) A(I), no. 769; CT #4151, General Order no. 7, September 7, 1914, 3:45 p.m., AFGG, I(III) A(I), no. 782; #4365, Specific Instruction no. 19, September 8, [1914], 6:30 p.m., AFGG, I(III) A(II), no. 1386; Specific Instruction no. 20, September 9, 1914, 10:00 p.m., AFGG, I(III) A(II),

dination of the offensive was thus suitably settled by Sir John's willingness to subordinate himself temporarily to the French Command in pursuit of a common goal. That arrangement was as effective in the short term as any which might have been worked out formally, but it was too fragile to bear the stress of operations under less than optimum conditions, as the stalemate on the Aisne would soon reveal.

Meantime, on September 6, just as the offensive began, Joffre's appeal of September 5 for diplomatic support had come to fruition, again embroiling command relations. Responding with alacrity to Joffre's request, Kitchener informed Sir John on the morning of the 6th of the French Government's desire that he "march with the utmost vigour."[18] Sir John, who resented Kitchener's intervention at Paris, had already attempted to reassert his independence by failing to communicate to Kitchener his precise plans for the combined offensive, leaving him to inquire via the diplomatic channel when the attack would take place.[19] The British Chief was thus doubly irritated by this new interference in his command, and responded with considerable vehemence toward the French

---

no. 2008 and n. 1, p. 466; #4669, Specific Instruction no. 21, September 10, 1914, AFGG, I(III) A(III), no. 2649; #4801, Specific Instruction no. 22, September 11, 1914, 5:15 p.m., AFGG, I(III) A(III), no. 3231; #4931, Specific Instruction no. 23, September 12, 1914, 2:30 p.m., AFGG, I(III) A(III), no. 3709; #5026-32, Specific Instruction no. 24, September 13, 1914, 10:30 a.m., AFGG, I(III) A(IV), no. 4216 and n. 1, p. 10.

[18] Huguet to Commander-in-Chief, September 6, 1914, 5:30 p.m. (arrived 7-9-14, 8:55 a.m.), AFGG, I(III) A(I), no. 242. See also CT #6384, War to Commander-in-Chief, 5/9 [1914], 6:30 p.m., AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 2460; Letters, Bertie to Grey, September 5, 6, 1914, Grey Papers, PRO, FO 800/56A/16-19, 20-21. The latter document shows Kitchener wired Sir John on the night of September 5. Arthur, Kitchener, III, 57 gives the text of the message but wrongly places it on September 4. Sir John received the message only on the 6th (no. 242 above).

[19] Letter, French to Kitchener, 7 September, 1914, HGW (1914), I, Appendix, 27, 538-39; Letter, Bertie to Grey, September 6, 1914, Grey Papers, PRO, FO 800/56A/20-21; cf. Arthur, Kitchener, III, 57.

who had initiated it.

The messages from Maunoury and Kitchener "would lead one to believe that to present I have not shown the desired energy," he complained bitterly to Joffre on the evening of the 6th in a letter which, however, did not arrive at GQG until the next morning. In an aggrieved tone, he reiterated his continuous marching and heavy losses of 20,000 and his attempt to conform the best he could to Joffre's desires. "Even today," he wrote, expressing the true situation, "while the Fifth Army hardly advanced, my Army in support of it moved so much forward as to be ahead of the others." Recoiling at the inference that he had not done his entire duty, he therefore asked Joffre to "wire Lord Kitchener immediately and to express his regrets that any such insinuations should have arisen, and to affirm that I have not ceased for an instance to give him the most effective and energetic collaboration."[20]

A good student of psychology, Joffre had learned the value of positive reinforcement in his dealing with the British. He was also sufficiently astute politically to know that Sir John was ever anxious to reaffirm his position before the politicians. His growing finesse was demonstrated that morning.

> Joffre says to prepare a telegram of thanks (!) for him [wrote Berthelot] for the help given by the British Army in the present battle, which will be transmitted to him by the Minister of War. He also sends a personal letter to French, forwarding the telegram to him, and adds, smiling, that it is for future assistance.[21]

Always sensitive to his political position, Sir John was particularly pleased with this message of public thanks, which, sent to Kitchener, would likely appear in the British newspapers the next morning. In it Joffre warmly thanked the British Armies for their "constant support" and expressed gratitude "to Marshal French, who has always given our armies the most effective cooperation." His "very energetic" support in the current action against the German right flank, said the communiqué, "is of the highest value."[22] This generous praise, coupled with Joffre's personal apologies for any insinuations which might have arisen and the promise of a rebuff to Gallieni for having acted beyond the scope of his authority,[23] "deeply moved" Sir John, who was now fully satisfied.[24] A new era of good relations had begun.

---

[20] Huguet to Commander-in-Chief, September 6, 1914, 5:30 p.m. (arrived 7-9-14, 8:55 a.m.), AFGG, I(III) A(I), no. 242; see "Location of the French Armies, September 6, 1914, (evening)," AFGG, I(III), Map #3.

[21] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 7, 1914, p. 98.

By a calculated response, sensitive to Sir John's ego and his political needs, Joffre had successfully wriggled out of the implications of his earlier appeal for diplomatic intervention. The anglophobia of Berthelot and Gallieni had not been allowed to prevail over the need for good relations with the British. The stakes were too high for such pettiness. At the same time, most of the problems of coordination were resolved by Sir John's voluntary submission to French directives, which followed daily thereafter. The pattern was thus set for Allied cooperation during the rest of the offensive.

The only other event of any significance in Allied military relations during the Battle of the Marne occurred on September 8 when

---

[22] CT 4115, Commander-in-Chief to the Minister of War, 7/9 [1914], 9:50 a.m., AFGG, I(III) A(I), no. 774 and n. 1, p. 550.

[23] Tel. message #4119, Commander-in-Chief, French Armies, to Commander-in-Chief, British Forces, September 7, 1914, 9:30 a.m., AFGG, I(III) A(I), no. 773.

[24] Tel. message #6815, Huguet to GQG, 7/9 [1914], noon, AFGG, I(III) A(I), no. 801.

Joffre repeatedly urged the British to move forward across the Marne, into the gap between the German First and Second Armies. In his zeal to crush the French Fifth Army, von Kluck had disobeyed Moltke's orders of September 2 to remain an echelon to the rear of von Bülow and, discounting the French and British forces on his right, had advanced ahead of the German Second Army. But as soon as Maunoury attacked on the Ourcq on September 5, the German Commander realized that the sole German corps posted north of the Marne was inadequate to cover his flank. He therefore withdrew northward of the Marne first one corps and then another and, finally, on September 8, the remaining two corps of his Army, leaving the French Fifth Army.[25] Although the Allied plan of rolling up von Kluck's flank was foiled by this manoeuvre, the French Command, fully informed by aerial surveillance and deciphered radio messages, was presented with the excellent opportunity of marching into the lightly held gap between the two German armies.[26]

A second consideration also motivated French demands. Fierce battles had raged on the fronts of the French Fifth, Sixth and Ninth Armies since the morning of the 6th.[27] But the cautious advance of the

---

[25] Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 174, 205-06, 215-17. For accounts of the Battle of the Marne by German participants, see Alexander von Kluck, The March on Paris; H. von Kuhl [Chief of Staff of the First Army, 1914], The Marne Campaign, 1914 (Fort Leavenworth, Texas: Command and General Staff School Press, 1936); L. Koeltz, ed. and tr., Documents allemands sur la Bataille de la Marne (Paris: Payot, 1930) (contains three volumes otherwise published separately: Field Marshal Karl von Bülow, Mon rapport sur la Bataille de la Marne; General Tappen, Jusqu'à la Marne en 1914; Lieutenant-Colonel W. Muller-Loebnitz, La mission du Lieutenant-Colonel Hentsch).

[26] Berthelot, Diary, I, entries of September 5, 6, 8, 1914, pp. 95, 100-02, 104-05.

[27] For a highly regarded French account of the Battle of the Marne, see Henri Contamine, La victoire de la Marne, 9 septembre 1914 ([Paris]: Gallimard, 1970); also Goutard, La Marne: victoire inexploitée

British Army, complained Gallieni, merely seemed to follow German retreat, and provided no support for his hard-pressed Sixth Army.[28] Both Berthelot and Joffre agreed that the British advance was not sufficiently rapid.[29] Time being required to reorient the Force eastward, the BEF had, in fact, proceeded across the Grand Morin with considerable circumspection on September 7, despite the lack of serious resistance.[30] The need for British support of the Sixth Army in the form of an attack on von Kluck's inner flank and the potential of a pierced German centre thus led Joffre to press the British three times on September 8 to hasten their advance and to cross the Marne.[31]

The British responded with energy and determination. Fully appreciating the "importance of an energetic and lively attack," they attempted to cross the Marne on the 8th, but determined cavalry resistance delayed their crossing until the next morning.[32] The first to cross the

---

and Gamelin, Manoeuvre, previously cited.

[28] Tel. message, Clergerie to Galbert, September 8, 1914, 8:00 a.m., AFGG, I(III) A(II), no. 1401; Tel. message, Military Governor of Paris to Commander-in-Chief, September 8, [1914], 1:40 p.m., AFGG, I(III) A(II), no. 1402; Personal letter, Gallieni to Joffre, September 8, 1914, AFGG, I(III) A(II), no. 1406.

[29] Berthelot, Diary, I, entries of September 7, 8, 1914, pp. 101, 104-05; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 410.

[30] Vidal, "L'Armée Britannique à la Bataille de la Marne," 357-59; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entries of September 6, 7, 1914; "Location of the French Armies, September 6, 1914, (evening), September 7, (evening)," AFGG, I(III), Maps #3, 4.

[31] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 8, 1914, pp. 103-05; Tel. message #4263, Commander-in-Chief to Head of French Mission, September 8, [1914], 9:00 a.m., AFGG, I(III) A(II), no. 1375; Tel. message #4343, Commander-in-Chief to Commander of British Armies, September 8, [1914], 3:30 p.m., AFGG, I(III) A(II), no. 1381; #4365, Specific Instruction no. 19, September 8, 1914, 6:30 p.m., AFGG, I(III) A(II), no. 1386; cf. Joffre, Mémoires, I, 410.

[32] Situation of the English Army at 1:00 p.m., September 8, [1914],

Marne on September 9, Sir John called for the support of d'Esperey on his right, but the tired XVIII Corps had not yet arrived in the evening.[33] Lack of French support and broken bridges which delayed British passage of the Marne thus prevented them from launching the attack on von Kluck's inner flank which Joffre had intended.[34]

The appearance of the BEF north of the Marne on September 9, nevertheless, was decisive. Fearful for the inner flanks and communications of their First and Second Armies, von Kluck and von Bülow, under the influence of Lieutenant-Colonel Hentsch, sent out with full authority from Moltke, began a general retreat on September 9 in order to close the gap between them.[35] Following French direction, the Allied armies pursued in a coordinated advance,[36] until, slowed by fatigue, fog and rain, and hampered by a change of the German cipher code and bad communication with GQG, their offensive ground to a halt before German barbed wire, heavy artillery and trenches on the Aisne on Sep-

---

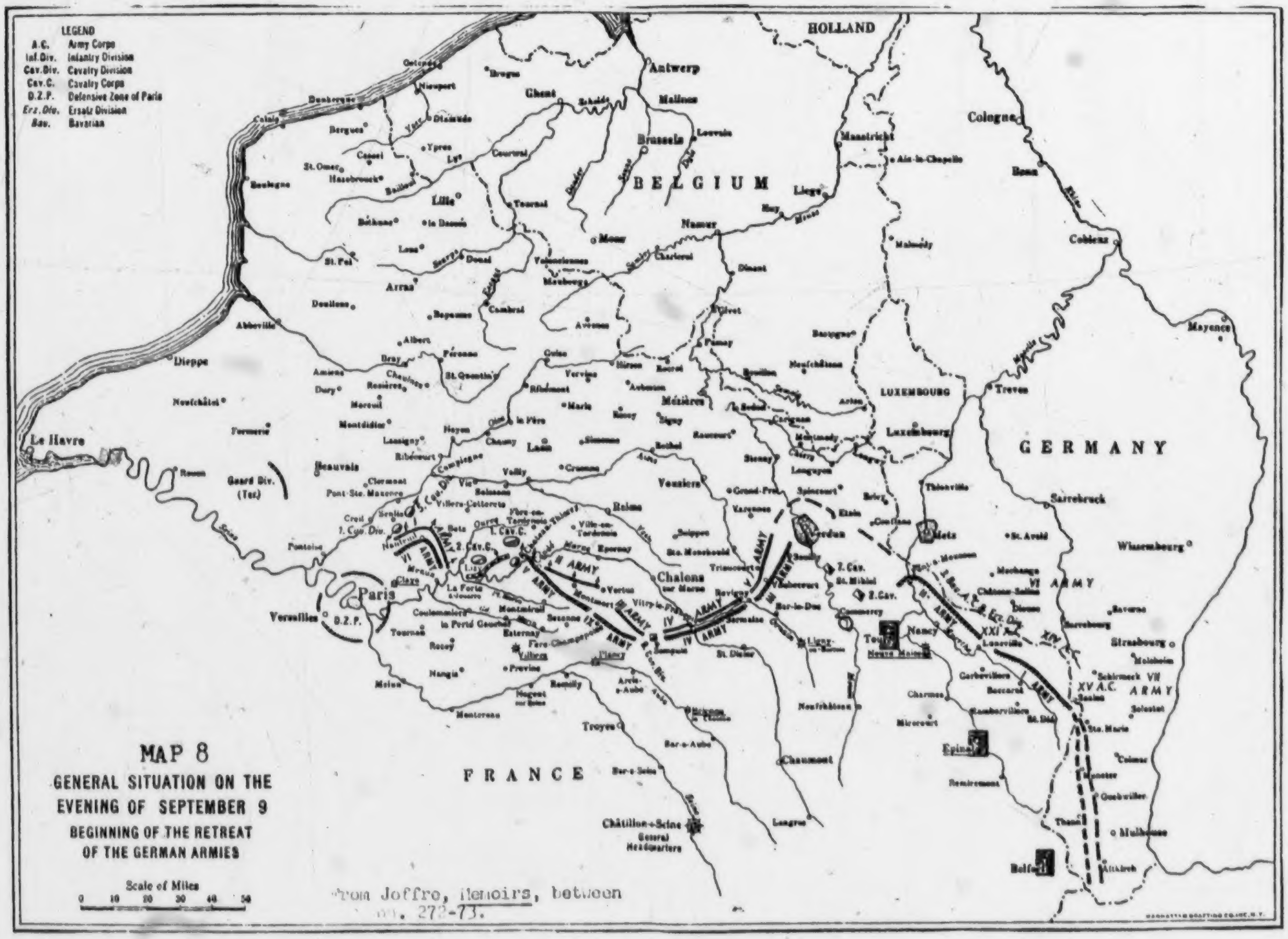
(telephoned to Vth Army from French Mission at British HQ between 4:30 and 5:00 p.m.), AFGG, I(III) A(II), no. 1395 and n. 2, p. 29; Tel. message #240/D, [Huguet to] GQG, VIth, Vth Armies , September 8, 1914, 2:45 p.m., (telephoned between 4:30 and 5:00 p.m.), AFGG, I(III) A(II), no. 1397; Vidal, "L'Armée Britannique à la Bataille de la Marne," 359-64.

[33] OA807, [British] Commander-in-Chief to Grand Quartier Général, 9/9 [1914], 11:00 a.m., AFGG, I(III) A(I), no. 2015; Tel. message, GQG to Vth Army, [September 9, 1914], 1:00 p.m., AFGG, I(III) A(II), no. 2019 and n. 2, p. 452; Tel. message #247A, Huguet to [GQG and Vth Army], September 9, 1914, 3:00 p.m., AFGG, I(III) A(II), no. 2021 and n. 2, p. 453; Tel. message, Huguet to GQG, September 9, 1914, 6:10 p.m., AFGG, I(III) A(II), no. 2025.

[34] HGW, (1914), I, 340.

[35] See HGW (1914), I, 342-43, 347-53 and notes. See Map 8, p.320.

[36] "Location of the French Armies, September 9-14 (evenings)," AFGG, I(III), Maps #6-11.


LEGEND
A.C. Army Corps
Inf.Div. Infantry Division
Cav.Div. Cavalry Division
Cav.C. Cavalry Corps
D.Z.P. Defensive Zone of Paris
Erz.Div. Ersatz Division
Bav. Bavarian
HOLLAND
BELGIUM
LUXEMBOURG
GERMANY
FRANCE
Antwerp
Brussels
Ghent
Lille
Namur
Liege
Cologne
Coblenz
Mayence
Treves
Metz
Verdun
Nancy
Toul
Epinal
Belfort
Strasbourg
Mulhouse
Reims
Chalons sur Marne
Paris
Versailles
D.Z.P.
Le Havre
Dieppe
Abbeville
Boulogne
Calais
Dunkerque
Amiens
Beauvais
Compiegne
Soissons
Laon
Troyes
Chaumont
Langres
Châtillon-s-Seine General Headquarters
Guard Div. (Ter)
I ARMY
II ARMY
III ARMY
IV ARMY
V ARMY
VI ARMY
VII ARMY
XV A.C.
XXI A.C.
XIV
1. Cav. Div.
1. Cav. C.
2. Cav. C.
7. Cav.
2. Cav.
Scale of Miles
0 10 20 30 40 50

MAP 8

GENERAL SITUATION ON THE EVENING OF SEPTEMBER 9

BEGINNING OF THE RETREAT OF THE GERMAN ARMIES

From Joffre, *Memoirs*, between pp. 272-73.

tember 13-14.[37]

The "uncontestable victory" of the Marne drew the two commands together in a common bond.[38] Thanking the British for the excellent surveillance of their airplanes on September 9, Joffre spoke of the "victorious action" of the British in his directive of September 10.[39] No further complaints were heard from the abrasive Gallieni, relieved of command of the Sixth Army on September 11 as it moved away from Paris.[40] Even the anglophobic Berthelot, whose critical comments abated, remarked on the uncommon zeal of the British in their attack of September 14.[41] In the absence of a well-defined arrangement between commands, an acceptable level of tactical coordination was thus achieved for a short time by mutual commitment to a common goal, careful personal relations, and success on the field of battle. But the concern of the British Government for the defence of Dunkirk and Calais on September 11[42] and Sir John's request the next day for a role in drawing up future plans[43] suggested that the new-found harmony in Allied relations would not endure forever.

---

[37] Berthelot, Diary, I, entries of September 11, 12, 13, 14, pp. 114-15, 121, 125-26; Alexandre, Avec Joffre, entries of September 13, 14, 1914, pp. 145, 147.

[38] See Joffre, Mémoires, I, 422; French, 1914, p. 140; see Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 11, 1914, p. 116 for the phrase quoted, used to describe the results to the Minister.

[39] Tel. message 197A, [GQG to Huguet], September 7, 1914, 8:45 p.m., AFGG, I(III) A(II), no. 2005; #4669, Specific Instruction no. 21, September 10, 1914, AFGG, I(III) A(III).

[40] #4793, Commander-in-Chief to Military Governor of Paris, Commander of the VIth Army, September 11, 1914, 4:10 p.m., AFGG, I(III) A(III), no. 3230 and n. 2, p. 429.

[41] Berthelot, Diary, I, entries of September 10, 14, 1914, pp. 111-12, 126.

[42] T #381, [War to] GQG , 11/9 [1914], 11:15 a.m., AFGG, I(III) A(III), no. 3212.

[43] #8168, Huguet to GQG, September 12, 1914, 10:15 a.m., AFGG, I(III) A(III), no. 3726.

What was the British contribution on the Marne? Concerned about the danger to their right flank, the British had retreated more than necessary on the 5th, and had lost some time due to the faulty articulation of their forces on September 6. Proceeding with caution against light resistance, mainly cavalry, the British experienced only 1701 casualties from September 6 to the 10,[44] fewer than those during the initial retreat from Mons. Yet their advance had been better than that of the tired French Corps on their right and more aggressive than that by the French division on their left.[45] Their appearance on the Marne on September 9, moreover, ahead of the French, was decisive in inducing the Germans to retreat.

The brunt of the battle nonetheless was borne essentially by the French, desperate battles having raged on the fronts of the Sixth, Fifth and Ninth Armies, sustained by strong attacks of the Fourth and Third Armies and the holding action of the forces east of Verdun.[46] Although Joffre would have liked the British to advance with more haste, they fulfilled the role assigned them,[47] and much more by reason of their initial delay. Had their initial advance been more rapid, von Kluck would have been obliged to retain more forces on their front. The British then might have been prevented from making a decisive appearance on the Marne, one which was of vital strategic importance, not because of losses already inflicted on the Germans, but because, corresponding to the concept of "the fleet in being," the British were in a position to do decisive damage to the German inner flanks and lines of communication. Luck was definitely on the side of the Allies.

---

[44] HGW (1914), I, 363, n. 1. Sir John set the loss figure at 2,200 in the initial retreat from Mons.

[45] Vidal, "L'Armée Britannique à la Bataille de la Marne," p. 368.

[46] See supra, n. 27. Spears, Liaison, p. 288, n. 1 puts French losses to the end of September, 1914, at 329,000, or about one-sixth of their total losses of 1,796,000 killed, missing or taken prisoner during the entire war.

[47] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 422.

In terms of Allied military cooperation, moreover, the Battle of the Marne demonstrated that, under favourable conditions on the battlefield, acceptable results could be obtained for a common purpose in the absence of a precise command formula. The harmonious cooperation of the two commanders and the finely coordinated action on the field was a far cry from the breakdown of relations and zigzag course of the "Great Retreat." But Sir John's voluntary subordination, upon which that harmony depended, was dependent on strong support on his flanks, good working relations between himself, the generals on either side of him and the French Command, the maintenance of a common goal and, most of all, success on the field of battle. The relationship thus tended to be very fragile as the unsuccessful offensive on the Aisne was soon to demonstrate.

While asserting French leadership, Joffre, as usual, had attempted to obtain maximum participation from the British. His most notable attempt was the repeated exhortation on September 8 to cross the Marne. Although generally satisfied with British performance, he formed the impression, nonetheless, that Murray was the chief cause of excessive British "prudence."[48] Wilson, on the other hand, was, in his view, a "man of very lively intelligence," a man who "understands every situation,"

---

[49] *Ibid.*

and "a friend of France" to boot.[49] Not above intrigue in the pursuit of his goals, Joffre thus began to consider whether some adjustment ought not be made in the leadership at British Headquarters. And, ever intent on obtaining a more aggressive British stance and closer subordination of the British Command, he could be counted upon not to rest for long. But that is the subject of another chapter.[50]

The Aisne: Prelude to Conflict

No serious conflict developed between Sir John and the French between September 14 and 21 during the Battle of the Aisne. A bridge between the harmony of the Battle of the Marne and renewed conflict during the "Race to the Sea," the Aisne was a period of restive quiescence in Allied military relations. Stresses were manifest, however, which would later erupt into full-scale conflict. The "ephemeral confidence" engendered by the Battle of the Marne, moreover, remained tenuous, as demonstrated by Sir John's temporary flare-up on September 22. The Aisne period thus takes on the aspect of a prelude to the new crisis in Allied military relations which followed at the end of September, when French field strategy came into conflict with the desire of the British Command for a return to their old position on the Allied left flank and the political concerns of the British Government for the defence of Antwerp and the safety of the Channel coast.

British resistance to French leadership was first evidenced on September 11, when Sir John, who had been voluntarily submitting to French directives since September 6, insisted that a plan be drawn up, in concert with the British, for the anticipated pursuit beyond the

---

[49] Ibid.

[50] See below, Chapters XI, XII.

Aisne.[51] As a result, Wilson, whose talent as an intermediary was recognized by both commands, was dispatched to Chatillon-sur-Seine on September 13 to confer with Joffre's staff on the new plan.[52]

This consultation further revealed the tendency of the French to dominate discussion. By Wilson's own record, he had "a long talk with Joffre, Belin & Berthelot," who "explained the whole situation" to him, after which he "fell into complete agreement" with French plans to continue the offensive across the Aisne. He nonetheless obtained approval for his personal plan "to force the line through the impossible country of Givet" after an initial bound forward.[53]

Nothing, of course, came of these optimistic plans, which were predicated on the false belief that the German Second and Third Armies were splitting apart.[54] Berthelot's hope of being in Germany in three weeks -- Wilson, less optimistic, thought it would take four weeks[55] -- was dashed by determined German resistance to Allied attacks the next day on the Aisne, followed by strong German counter-attacks the following week.[56] Yet the incident shows the unwillingness of the British to remain for long in voluntary subordination to the French without active participation in the decision-making process. And, to have the third man in authority at British Headquarters return with a plan, partly of his own fabrication, which was to be accepted as the British plan, was a poor procedure for the maintenance of amicable staff relations at British Headquarters.

---

[51] Tel. message #8168, Huguet to GQG, September 12, 1914, 10:15 a.m., AFGG, I(III) A(III), no. 3726.

[52] Ibid.; Tel. message #4994, Commander-in-Chief to Marshal French, September 12, 1914, 6:00 p.m., AFGG, I(III) A(III), no. 3711; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 12, 1914.

[53] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 13, 1914; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 13, 1914.

[54] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 13,1914.

[55] Ibid.

[56] See Berthelot, Diary, I, entries of September 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 22, pp. 125, 127-33, 135-36, 146.

A second source of British discontent was their position in the line, wedged between two French armies, which greatly limited their freedom of manoeuvre. Minor difficulties thus arose on the Aisne as a result of the British position. Sir John, for example, still pursuing the attack, complained on September 13 that his right was not sufficiently supported by the French, which Joffre immediately rectified,[57] and on September 19 he expressed further annoyance to Kitchener with the slow progress of Maunoury's Army on his left.[58] Two days later, difficulties were reported between French and British troops.[59] These tensions indicated that serious stresses existed in the relationship, and Sir John's growing disenchantment at being, "as usual," "slightly in advance" of the French Armies and, in his view, "up against the worst part of the General Allied position," as his Army straddled the Aisne, did not augur well for the future of Allied military relations.[60]

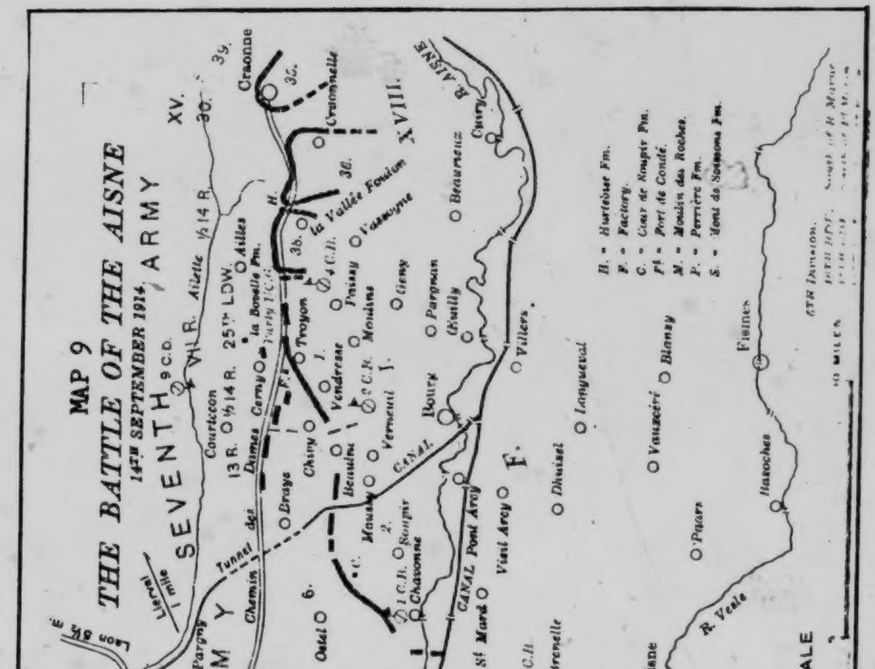
---

[57] Note of the French Mission at British HQ to Vth Army transmitted to GQG September 13, [1914], at 10:30 p.m., AFGG, I(III) A(IV), no. 4239, n. 1, p. 28; Military Mission at British HQ to Vth Army, 14 September, [1914], about 11:00 a.m., AFGG, I(III) A(IV), no. 4749, n. 1, p. 430; Tel. message #8752, [Huguet to] GQG, 14/9 [1914], at 10:55 p.m., AFGG, I(III) A(IV), no. 4754 and n. 1, p. 433. See Map 9, p. 327.

[58] Letter, French to Kitchener, September 19, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/23.

[59] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 21, 1914, p. 144. Joffre immediately apologized for the difficulties. (Ibid.)

[60] Letter, French to Kitchener, September 19, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/23.


MAP 9
THE BATTLE OF THE AISNE
14TH SEPTEMBER 1914.
SEVENTH ARMY
FIRST ARMY
XVIII.
XV.
Craonne
Chemin des Dames
Soissons
Vailly
Condé
Bourg
Braisne
Fismes
R. AISNE
R. Vesle
CANAL
34TH BDE.
19TH BDE.
SCALE
Corps I. Divisions 2.3
Boundaries Corps / Divisions
H. = Hurtebise Fm.
F. = Factory.
C. = Cour de Soupir Fm.
Pt. = Port de Condé.
M. = Moulin des Roches.
P. = Perrière Fm.
S. = Mont de Soissons Fm.

Adapted from HGW (1914), I, between pp. 376-77.

The flare-up came on September 22. Already the titanic struggle, later known as the "Race to the Sea," had begun between the German and French armies to outflank each other by moving forces west and north of their existing lines. Using the same procedure as the Germans, the French Command withdrew troops from behind entrenched positions and, extending the line, attempted not only to thwart German envelopment but to "constitute a mass of manoeuvre capable of enveloping the enemy." The decision was thus taken on September 17 to form a new force under Castelnau, the Second Army, on the left of the line, north of the Oise.[61]

But a French request on September 22 for renewed British attacks to hold German forces behind the now quiet front on the Aisne in order to take pressure off the new Army,[62] met with little response from Sir John. Wilson recorded the scene at British Headquarters with characteristic colour:

> **Tuesday, September 22, 1914**
> Today, both on our front, & in front of 5th & 6th Armies we had signs of drifting of the enemy to the West to oppose Castelnau. Joffre reported this by mid-day. D'Esperey (5th) also in the afternoon. At 6 o'clock Maunoury (6th) reported to us the same thing & said he would attack at 4.^{am} asking us to help. At 9^{pm} D'Esperey reported he would attack at 6^{am} & asked for help.
>
> Sir John was very irritable and stupid, cussing the French in the most childish manner. [In the evening, he telephoned Maunoury to say that the British would attack with all their might but only after the Sixth Army crossed the Aisne as he had done to support his flank. At midnight Joffre wires saying 5th & 6th would attack and asking us to help.] After much silly nonsense, Sir John agreed to meet the [British] Corps Commanders at Braine at 11^{am} then 10^{am} . . .
>
> . . . Of course he has no brains at all.[63]

---

[61] Berthelot, Diary, I, entries of September 16, 17, 1914, pp.131-34.

[62] Ibid., entry of September 22, 1914, pp. 146-47.

[63] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 22, 1914. My new paragraph at "Sir John . . ."; the information in brackets is from Tel. message, Huguet to GQG, 6th Army, [September 22, 1914, evening], AFGG, I(IV) A(I), no. 839 and n. 2, p. 764.

> Wednesday, September 23, 1914
> A very disappointing day. . . . We . . . did not attack at all.[64]

The British Force, still concerned, under this first manifestation of trench warfare, over the need for secure flanks, merely gave artillery support to the French Armies on their inner flanks.[65] Effective action then ceased on the Aisne.

British failure to cooperate with this French attack was indicative of the mood and temper at British Headquarters. The "atmosphere of confidence" in Allied relations growing out of the victory of the Marne, to which Joffre later made allusion, had hardly arrived.[66] In fact, the British were experiencing a growing sense of irritation and frustration with their position in the line between two French armies, which forbade any independent action (or inaction) and required very minute coordination. A position on the far left, with its greater freedom of movement, would thus be especially appealing.

Linked to the growth of British discontent with their position in the line, moreover, was the renewal of British confidence after the Battle of the Marne. Wilson's excessive optimism, expressed on September 13 in his discussion with the French, was shared by others at British Headquarters. As a result of success on the Marne, the British Command had, in effect, recovered from its earlier depression and confidence in British arms had returned.[67] The British Army, well forward in the line, fought very hard in its position partly across the Aisne, suffered heavy losses, and, in common with the French, recognized only very slowly that the Aisne offensive could not succeed.[68] British optimism, moreover, was further enhanced by the arrival of the 6th Division on the Aisne on September 16,[69] full replacement of losses during the battle, and the promise of two Indian divisions, two regular divisions, and two cavalry divisions to strengthen the Force. "Fully reinforced & refitted," Sir John "took a sanguine view of the military situation," Asquith reported to the King on September 23.[70]

---

[64] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 23,1914.

[65] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 23, 1914, p. 148; Huguet to Commander, VIth Army, September 24, [1914], 3:30 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 1085.

[66] See Joffre, Mémoires, I, 465, 479, 142, 422.

[67] "The English have once again taken pleasure in battle," wrote

Out of that optimism grew the desire after September 24 to resume the former British position on the Allied left wing. That position would provide greater freedom of action, easier communication with Great Britain and, most of all, the coveted opportunity for decisive action on the German flank. A further incentive was the concern of the

---

the anglophobic Berthelot on September 16. (Ibid., entry of September 16, 1914, p. 130.)

[68] See "Location of the French Armies, September 14, 1914 (evening)," AFGG, I(III), Map #11; Berthelot, Diary, I, entries of September 14, 16, 18, 21, pp. 126, 130, 135, 143. Wilson, in his Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 14, 1914, put losses for that day's heavy fighting (September 14) at "200 officers & 3000 to 4000 men." Sir John French estimated these losses more realistically at 1500. (French, Diary, entry of September 14, 1914, p. 152.) Also see Clark, The Donkeys, pp. 17-20; HGW (1914), I, 395-96, 419-20, 430; Letters, French to Kitchener, September 24, October 1, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/28-29. T. #5342, Commander-in-Chief to Commanders of All Armies except I and II, September 15, 1914, 11 a.m.; #5613, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, September 17, [1914], 7:30 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(I), nos. 11, 241.

[69] HGW (1914), I, 440; Letter, French to Kitchener, September 8, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/20.

[70] #402, Panouse [Military Attaché in London] to Minister of War, September 10, 1914, AE, Série "Guerre 1914-1918," #534, pp. 92-93; Letter, French to Kitchener, September 24, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/28; Letter, Asquith to the King, 23 September, 1914, PRO, Cab 41/35/47 R/184.

British Government for the fate of the Channel ports which demanded that the new forces be concentrated on the Channel coast rather than on the Aisne.[71]

The main issues of renewed conflict thus had their origins in the Aisne period. To concentrate British forces on the Allied far left, the BEF would have to be withdrawn immediately from the Aisne, transported north and engaged at once in the most crucial part of the line. The French Command, which had deliberately encased the BEF with French troops early in the campaign to ensure greater French control, would have strong reservations about each step of this manoeuvre which placed the fate of the industrial north of France in the hands of the British. In French eyes, the British could not be trusted to lead a vigourous offensive without support on either side. The experience of the "Great Retreat" and the battles of the Marne and Aisne confirmed this image in the mind of the French Command. At the end of September, moreover, when the fate of Antwerp was about to be decided by the Germans, differing strategies with regard to Belgium would become a significant source of conflict between the British Government and the French Command.[72]

The Battle of the Aisne from September 14-21 thus marked the prelude to renewed crisis in Allied military relations. Sir John clearly indicated at the outset that he no longer intended to take French direction without some say in Allied planning. His position in the line, moreover, sandwiched between two French armies, was particularly galling, as it destroyed his freedom of action and obliged him to follow French directives. Under the frustrating circumstances of stalemate on the Aisne, as the Allied offensive failed to produce results against German entrenchment, the tenuous understanding between commands established during the Battle of the Marne thus began to show signs of serious stress. The old maxim "that nothing succeeds like success" was especially true in Allied military relations on the Marne, based as these were on a tenuous footing of confidence and good will; the converse appeared to be equally true, as demonstrated on the Aisne.

---

[71] T 381, Guerre to Staff, Chatillon-sur-Seine, 11/9 [1914], 11:15 a.m., AFGG, I(III) A(III), no. 3212; CT #5819, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, September 18, [1914], 9:57 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(I), no. 396. See below, Chapter IX, for a fuller treatment.

[72] See below, Chapter IX.

CHAPTER IX

ANTWERP AND THE MOVE NORTH: BRITISH STRATEGIC POLICY VERSUS FRENCH FIELD STRATEGY

SEPTEMBER 24 - OCTOBER 10, 1914

The strategic debate in Great Britain between the "blue water" school and the "interventionists," which had been adjourned by the decision on August 5-6 to dispatch the BEF to the continent, was reopened at the end of the month when French field strategy failed to provide an effective defence of the vital Channel ports. The question of the defence of the ports exposed by Allied retreat from Belgium became particularly acute in mid-September after the Allied counter-offensive ground to a halt on the Aisne and the danger of German capture of some of the ports greatly increased. British strategic policy then called for concentration of British forces nearer the Channel: After the German attack on Antwerp on September 28, the demand was for an immediate expedition to protect the vital port. French field strategy, however, clung to the idea of decisive victory in the field over the German Army by means of a manoeuvre against the German right flank. The stage was thus set for a basic strategic conflict between the British Government and the French Command, with the British Command caught in between, siding sometimes with the Government, sometimes with the French.

Admiralty Sideshows: Ostend and Dunkirk
August 24, September 19-20, 1914

The string of Channel ports from Antwerp to Boulogne, in peacetime the gateway to British trade with the continent, were of vital strategic importance to the British. In the hands of the enemy these ports could become submarine and destroyer bases, menace the lines of communication of the BEF, and endanger the main trade routes to London.[1] Their defence was therefore essential. But the separation of the Belgian Field Army from the Anglo-French left at the outset of the campaign as a result of the Allied retreat from Belgium and the Belgian retreat on Antwerp opened the way to direct German attack on the ports.[2] The relatively "undefended condition" of the vital Channel ports against any "serious effort of the enemy" thereafter inspired the British Government with lively alarm "for many anxious weeks."[3]

The safety of the ports depended on German pursuit of their major objective in France. Compared with the destruction of the French Army, seizure of the Channel ports was a secondary objective which could be deferred until after the first major offensive.[4] In the interim, the fortress of Antwerp, in which the Belgian Army had taken refuge, posed a significant obstacle to German occupation of the vital ports. Two German corps which might otherwise have pushed on to Calais were obliged by a Belgian sortie from Antwerp on August 25-26 to mask the fortress in order to assure the safety of the exposed German lines of communication into France until heavy artillery became available for the reduction of the two lines of fortifications of the somewhat dated fortress.[5] Antwerp thus "threatened the flanks and rear of the German Armies in France" during the initial German offensive and temporarily "guarded the whole line of the Channel ports."[6] But the ports would be secure only as long as they remained a secondary objective of the German High Command.

---

[1] Hankey, The Supreme Command, I, 193; General Erich von Falkenhayn, General Headquarters, 1914-1916, and its Critical Decisions (London: Hutchinson & Co., [1924]), pp. 27-28, 29.

[2] Hankey, The Supreme Command, I, 192.

[3] Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 320.

[4] von Kluck, The March on Paris, pp. 4ff; Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 329-30; Hankey, The Supreme Command, I, 193.

Because all available British regular forces not required for home defence had either been sent or promised to the BEF in France, the British were able to do little for the direct defence on land of the Channel ports. The plucky young First Lord of the Admiralty, however, ready for any dramatic little enterprise, fell in with an idea of Maurice Hankey, Secretary of the nigh defunct Committee of Imperial Defence and an ardent partisan of the "blue water" school, for a feint landing of Royal Marines on the Belgian coast. The purpose of the demonstration would be to bluff the Germans into diverting additional forces from their main operations in France in order to protect their long and exposed lines of communication. This little "adventure" which, according to Asquith, Churchill took "very seriously," was approved by a small group of Ministers, Grey, Kitchener and the Prime Minister, meeting informally on August 25.[7] As a result, a brigade of 3000 Royal Marines landed at Ostend on August 27-28. They, however, produced no tangible results and had to be reembarked a week later on August 31 when the selection of St. Nazaire as a British base placed new demands for transports and patrols on the Royal Navy. A small innovative force of airplanes and armoured cars which had landed with the Royal Marines remained behind at Ostend for a short time until they were transferred to Dunkirk to assure British aerial defence against German zeppelins.[8]

---

[5] Wanty, L'art de la guerre, II, 128-29; Falkenhayn, General Headquarters, p. 12; Hankey, The Supreme Command, I, 193.

[6] Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 320; cf. Falkenhayn, General Headquarters, p. 12.

[7] Hankey, The Supreme Command, I, 194-95; Asquith, Memories and Reflections, II, 195; Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 310.

The Ostend demonstration marked Churchill's conversion to the "blue water" school. As an "interventionist," he had earlier played a decisive role in guaranteeing the safe dispatch of the BEF to the continent. But, as was often the case during his career, he now began to take up the point of view of the ministry with which he was most closely associated.[9] Other sea-borne operations would therefore follow: the landing at Dunkirk on September 19-20, the expedition for the relief of Antwerp in early October, and finally the disastrous Gallipoli expedition of 1915 which would lead to Churchill's fall from power.

The First Lord's concern for the defence of the Channel ports was manifest in other ways. On September 7, he proposed reinforcing Antwerp with British Territorial divisions. Kitchener, however, did not wish to use the poorly trained Territorials "in the manner prescribed," and Grey, as on August 5, was not prepared to raise the question of British troop transports up the Scheldt with the neutral Dutch. Bruges and Ghent still remained as possible bases, but Churchill considered defending the lines of communication of an army operating from these towns to Antwerp hazardous and difficult. As a result, nothing was done for the defence of Antwerp or the support of the Belgian Army until the German attack at the end of September.[10] In the meantime, Churchill's attention shifted to defence of the French Channel ports of Dunkirk, Calais and Boulogne, which he personally visited on September 10. He was somewhat relieved to learn that the French had provided Dunkirk with an entrenched camp, a garrison of 18,000 men and 400 guns, and Calais with a garrison of 7,000 men, although Boulogne had almost no defences. French coastal defences would therefore be capable of guarding against a German coup-de-main, but they would not be able to resist a sustained German attack.[11]

---

[8] See Hankey, The Supreme Command, I, 195-98; Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 310-18; cf. Falkenhayn, General Headquarters, p. 12.

[9] See Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 34, 36-37, 94-95ff.

Kitchener, who feared just such an attack on the ports as a result of troop movements in Belgium that very moment, then explored with the French Command the possibility of concentrating British regular forces for the defence of the Channel ports. On September 11, at the height of the Marne offensive, he suggested to Joffre via the diplomatic channel that fresh troops (6th Division) intended for the BEF in the field be diverted to Calais and Dunkirk.[12] This inopportune suggestion was rejected by Joffre out of hand during the Battle. The French Command became more favourable to the proposal of a British coastal operation, however, once their offensive bogged down on the Aisne and the decision had been made to seek the enemy's flank in the so-called "Race to the Sea." With an eye on the British Territorials, the wily Joffre urged Kitchener on September 18 that every available British unit be concentrated at Dunkirk.[13] "Joffre is very anxious that we should make a diversion on the north coast of France to frighten the Germans as to their lines of communications," wrote Asquith on September 19.[14]

---

[10] Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 332-35.

[11] Ibid., 321.

[12] T 381, Guerre to Staff, Chatillon-sur-Seine, 11/9 [1914], 11:15 a.m., AFGG, I(III) A(III), no. 3212.

The British did not take the bait. To French regret, Kitchener, instead of sending Territorials, which he still considered ill-fit for field operations or even serious home defence,[15] asked Churchill to re-embark his little force of 3,000 Royal Marines, which landed at Dunkirk on September 19-20. The Marine Brigade was accompanied this time by 50 omnibusses from the streets of London and a regiment of yeomanry cavalry which Churchill obtained from Kitchener as part of the deal.[16] Joined by the airplanes and armoured cars from Ostend, the little mixed force waged a glamourous little "private" war against German Uhlan patrols roaming the area, sending small detachments into points as far away as Ypres, Lille, Tournai and Douai until the Marine Brigade was sent to Antwerp on October 3.[17]

The Dunkirk landing ended the Admiralty's strategy of small diversions on the Channel ports. While the Ostend debarkation may be attributed largely to Churchill's quest for adventure, the Dunkirk landing derived, at least in part, from Kitchener's growing concern for the defence of the Channel ports. The British Government, in fact, was becoming more and more nervous about the defence of Dunkirk and Calais and would soon demand that the BEF relocate nearer the vital seaports on the Allied left flank in direct defence of British interest.

---

[13] CT #5819, Commander-in-Chief to War Minister, September 18, [1914], 9:57 a.m., *AFGG*, I(IV) A(I), no. 396; CT #6519, Commander-in-Chief to Huguet, September 21, [1914], 1:45 p.m., *AFGG*, I(IV) A(I), no. 708. Cf. Churchill, *The World Crisis*, I, 321, who claims Joffre telegraphed Kitchener on September 16, asking whether a Brigade of Marines could not be sent to Dunkirk. Cf. Hankey, *The Supreme Command*, I, 197-98, who indicates Joffre asked for all available British troops. Joffre later complained that the British had not given satisfaction to his request for British Territorials at Dunkirk. (CT #7963, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, September 29, [1914], 6:42 p.m., *AE*, Série "Guerre 1914-1918," #534, p. 97 -- in *AFGG*, I(IV) A(II), no. 1610.)

[14] Asquith, *Memories and Reflections*, II, 33.

[15] See Hankey, *The Supreme Command*, I, 194; Churchill, *The World Crisis*, I, 335; Berthelot, *Diary*, I, entry of October 2, 1914, p. 168.

[16] Hankey, *The Supreme Command*, I, 197098; Churchill, *The World Crisis*, I, 321.

[17] Churchill, *The World Crisis*, I, 317-18, 321; Hankey, *The Supreme Command*, I, 198.

Conflict over Transferring the BEF to the North

The Allied counter-offensive which ended in stalemate on the Aisne left the French Command in an awkward position. The "uncontestable" but incomplete victory of the Marne had clearly frustrated the German plan of beating the western Allies before turning on the Russians.[18] Yet the German Army remained in France, unbeaten, and in possession of much of the rich French industrial region of the north of France. In their prewar plans the French had failed to protect their vital industrial heartland on the ill-founded assumption that defeat of the German armies in the field would guarantee its safety.[19] That strategy having failed, the French were to awaken in mid-September to the extreme gravity of the situation which, as the lines finally stabilized, placed the Germans in control of one-tenth of French territory, four-fifths of their coal and nine-tenths of their iron.[20]

---

[18] See Joffre, Mémoires, I, 425-26; Falkenhayn, General Headquarters, pp. 13-15.

[19] See Testimony of Belin, April 8, 1919, Commission d'enquête, p. 280. According to Bertie, Joffre would have been given a Marshal's baton had the victory of the Marne been more decisive. (CT., Bertie [to Grey], PRO, Grey Papers, FO/800/55A/117.)

[20] Cruttwell, The Great War, p. 113.

The French Command pinned its hopes for redeeming the industrial north on defeat of the German Army. Although the French Army faced a serious munitions crisis on the Aisne, with over half its artillery stocks used up,[21] Joffre was optimistic after September 17 that an enveloping manoeuvre against the German right flank would pull the German line apart as on the Marne and lead to renewed advance of the entire Allied line.[22] The success of the manoeuvre, however, would depend on the alacrity with which Allied forces could be concentrated in the north of France, using the two rail lines still available for that purpose,[23] and the speed and determination with which these forces could be engaged on the German flank. The British desire to leave the Aisne sector, where French units would have to take over, would move the BEF to the most decisive part of the battle, upon which hung vital French interest. That required an act of considerable confidence on the part of the French Command--an act of faith for which, even after the victory of the Marne, they were still not prepared.

The decision to move the BEF to the Allied left wing was made by the British Command in consultation with the British Government. It involved a rare example of complete harmony between Government and Command on strategic matters, although each had different reasons for wanting to move. Recognizing that Cabinet approval would be required for a strategic decision of this importance, Sir John had first broached the matter with Kitchener on September 24. "If Castelnau's attack fails or ends in stalemate," wrote Sir John, faced with the breakdown of the Allied advance on the Aisne, "I should like to suggest to the Commander-in-Chief [Joffre] to place the British forces once more on the Allied left."[24] The idea actually came from Wilson, who had discussed the matter with Sir John after visiting Castelnau's army that day.[25] "With two new Corps and fresh Cavalry Divisions," wrote Sir John, reflecting the prewar dream of a great victory on the German right flank, "I feel quite confident we could get well in on the German flank and bring about decisive results."[26] His frustration at being sandwiched between two French armies on the Aisne has already been described. As a cavalry officer, "Sir John considered that the plains of Flanders would afford his cavalry opportunities hitherto denied it."[27] "The troops are wonderfully fit and well and in high spirits and we are longing to get forward again," he wrote. "I will write more fully on the subject later," he concluded, reflecting the tentative nature of his suggestions.[28]

---

[21] Desmazes, Joffre, pp. 148-49; Alexandre, Avec Joffre, pp. 158-60; Berthelot, Diary, I, entries of September 21, 24, 27, 1914, pp. 145, 150-51, 156.

[22] Herbillon, Souvenirs, p. 40, entry of September 20, 1914.

[23] On the means of transport available to both sides, see "French and German Forces," [3rd Bureau Note], 4 October, [1914], AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 2011 and n. 2, p. 677; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 445.

However, the next day Sir John's natural caution returned. "Before dinner he told me," wrote Wilson, "that he had given up all idea of going on the left because the Indian Div[isions] could not be here till the end of Oct. . . . He said he would not go on the left with 3 Corps & 2 Cav. Div. because he would be afraid [of being overwhelmed with such a small force] after his Mons & Le Cateau experience."[29] But Wilson, arguing that German troops were not the "avalanche" they once were, nearly convinced Sir John that evening to make the move after all, and Huguet, grossly out of touch with the thinking of his own Command, "backed" up the idea of going north "for all it was worth" when it was "aired" at the dinner table.[30] On the next day, September 26, the matter was again discussed, but Sir John was again hesitant, this time because Haig still held out the possibility of moving forward on the Aisne.[31]

---

[24] Letter, French to Kitchener, 24 September, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/28.

[25] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 24, 1914.

[26] Letter, French to Kitchener, 24 September, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/28.

[27] HGW (1914), II, 29.

[28] Letter, French to Kitchener, 24 September, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/28.

The final decision was made only with the encouragement of Churchill and Kitchener, the chief authors of British military policy during this period and the dominant members of Asquith's Cabinet.[32] Because of the strained relationship between Kitchener and Sir John after their meeting on September 1, Kitchener asked Churchill to discuss the matter with Sir John for him while on a visit to British Headquarters at Fère-en-Tardenois on September 26.[33] Churchill thus urged on Sir John "the advantages of disengaging the British Army from its position on the

---

[29] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 25,1914.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid., entry of September 26, 1914.

[32] See Guinn, British Politics and Strategy, p. 34

[33] Martin Gilbert, Winston S. Churchill, Vol. III, 1914-1916 (London: Heinmann, 1971), p. 81. But cf. Churchill to Kitchener, September 26, 1914; Letter, Kitchener to Churchill, [September 26, 1914], in Gilbert, Churchill, III, Companion, I, Documents July 1914 - April 1915 (London: Heinmann, 1972), pp. 140-41. Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 281, and Gilbert, Churchill, III, 81, have wrongly given the date of the visit as September 16. (See Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 27, 1914; Gilbert, Churchill, III, Companion, I, 119-22, 153.)

Aisne and its transportation to its natural station on the sea flank in contact with the Navy."[34] British lines of communication would thereby be shortened greatly, and the BEF would be in a position to defend the Channel ports directly--a matter of grave importance to Kitchener, who feared a German attack on the ports.[35] Churchill's arguments convinced Sir John. Symbolic of his enthusiasm for the enterprise, Churchill even promised to give Sir John's cavalry mobile infantry support by sending his little force of Marines forward from Dunkirk in trucks.[36]

Kitchener and the Prime Minister, with whom Churchill discussed the matter on his return to London, approved of the new strategic plan. "I have had a strong feeling all along that if you could get on the left of the line," Kitchener wired to Sir John on September 29, "your efforts there, supported by us with extra cavalry, would have the best effect. You can tell Joffre of my opinion if you think advisable," he added.[37] The Cabinet having given final approval, Sir John was now able to submit "definite proposals" to the French Command.[38] Complete accord between Government and Command in this instance gave him a very strong hand in dealing with the French.

The proposal of transferring the BEF north had been mooted with the French Command in the meantime, bringing the issue to head even before official discussions. Huguet, of course, had been aware of British deliberations all along. On September 27, after his conversation with Churchill, Sir John authorized Clive to "tell Joffre that he (Sir John) was ready to pull out & go on the extreme left." Thinking, on the basis of Huguet's earlier assessment, that this move would be popular with the French Command, Sir John insisted in return that the French take over his forward position across the Aisne rather than the shorter line dug in behind the river.[39]

---

[34] Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 281; see Gilbert, Churchill, III, 81.

[35] Gilbert, Churchill, III, 81.

[36] French, Diaries, entry of September 27, 1914, p. 160.

[37] CT #1247, Kitchener to John French, 29-9-1914, Kitchener Office Papers, PRO, WO 159/14; Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 281.

[38] Letter, French to Kitchener, 1st October, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/29; cf. Gerald French, Sir John French, p. 242.

Joffre, however, to Sir John's great surprise, gave Clive "a blank refusal" the next day to "Sir John's request to be taken out of the line."[40] The reason, Wilson learned privately from Huguet, who had discussed the matter with Joffre at GQG on the 27th, was lack of confidence in British ability to undertake an offensive action on their own. "Joffre would not pull us out because they could not trust Sir John & Murray to act with energy unless both his flanks were secure," wrote Wilson.[41] The defensive capabilities of the British Army having never been in doubt, the French were not so much afraid of a German breakthrough to the coast as British failure to pursue the desired offensive with adequate vigour. In the prewar stereotype of British character, the British appeared stolid and unimaginative, which in military terms meant they were well-suited for the defensive but lacked the vital élan necessary for offensive action. That estimate, fortified by the experience of the "Great Retreat" and the Marne and Aisne offensives during which, in French eyes at least, acceptable results had been obtained only when the British received strong support on their flanks, now led the French Command to believe that the British were ill-suited for return to an offensive role on the Allied left wing. "They (Joffre, Belin & Berthelot) have been much impressed," wrote Wilson, "by the caution of Sir John & Murray."[42]

---

[39] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 27, 1914; see also entry of September 24, 1914.

[40] Ibid., entry of September 28, 1914.

[41] Ibid., entry of September 27, 1914.

Mistrust and lack of confidence thus continued to be one of the main impediments to Allied military relations. "The French are dissatisfied with us & don't trust Sir John or Murray," wrote Wilson, setting forth in bold terms the basic cause of French discontent which would plague Allied relations for several months to come. "The case is not nearly so bad as it was at Melun," he observed, "but still it is unfortunate."[43]

Much shadow-boxing then followed as the British pressed their demands for the transfer and the French Command, under Wilson's urging, conceded them bit by bit until they finally revealed the real reason for their reluctance to agree. The matter was officially taken up on September 29 when Sir John, fortified by Cabinet approval, officially demanded that the transfer of the BEF to the outer flank begin at once.[44] Sir John's motives for pressing the matter at that moment, however, were not entirely pure. "I am beginning to think that K & Johnnie H[amilton] may be contemplating sending 7th & 8th Div. & Indians to the left of Castelnau," wrote Wilson, ready for every new intrigue, "& thus make another army under Johnnie." Alarmed by the prospect of a divided command, Sir John, highly suspicious of Kitchener's intentions, agreed with Wilson that "it becomes imperative for us to get out of where we are & get up on the left." The British Chief thus approved "with slight alterations" "a strong minute" written by Wilson outlining the major reasons for the desired move and told him "to take it to Joffre at once."[45]

---

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid., entry of September 28, 1914.

[44] Note of Marshal Sir John French, Commander British Army, to General Joffre, Commander, French Armies, September 29, 1914, AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 1615.

A master of persuasion, Wilson, in his memorandum, deliberately appealed to the fundamental French desire to obtain maximum participation from the British Army. In three or four weeks, he argued, the arrival of two infantry and one cavalry divisions each from Britain and India would swell British forces to an army of five infantry corps and two cavalry corps, or almost twice its current strength. On the Allied left flank this force would have a "freedom of action, field of operations" and "possibility of initiative" even beyond the proportionate increase in numbers, Wilson argued, because much of the force would be fresh. In his attempt to convince the French, Wilson thus incorporated his own optimism and that of Sir John for "decisive results" on the Allied flank and, at the same time, confirmed British frustration at being locked into the French line on the Aisne. Concentration of the British Army closer to the Channel, said the note, summarizing Churchill's wish to "join Army and Navy," would shorten British lines of communication and thus relieve French railways. The move, however, would have to be undertaken at once, before the confusion of a new offensive, as British lines in front of and behind the Aisne had been strongly fortified and the front temporarily stabilized.[46]

---

[45] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 29, 1914; cf. Letter, French to Kitchener, 1st October, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/29.

In typical Wilsonian fashion, the note promised the French too much. Wilson said nothing of anticipated delays in the arrival of the Indian divisions and Sir John's reluctance to engage fully in the dangerous northern theatre without them. Nor did Wilson mention Sir John's ulterior motive of moving north in order to maintain a united command. Such exaggeration of British capabilities in a less than frank communication could only lead to a false expectation and serious difficulties with the French at a later date when the anticipated results were not forthcoming.

Wilson, nevertheless, had serious difficulty persuading the French. Arriving at Romilly-sur-Seine at 9:30 p.m. on the 29th, accompanied by Huguet, he saw only Belin and Berthelot, Joffre having already gone to bed. "Belin was impatient of the suggestion" of moving the British north, and Berthelot indicated that a counter-proposal had been forwarded to the British that afternoon asking them to take over the lines of the 45th Division on the British left.[47] "A good counter-attack" to the British proposal, Wilson observed, and indeed it was, as the French continued to press their proposal for three days while negotiating the major issue, until the British finally rejected it outright.[48]

---

[46] Note of Marshal Sir John French, Commander British Army, to General Joffre, Commander French Armies, September 29, 1914, AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 1615; Letter, French to Kitchener, 1st October, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/29; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 30, 1914, p. 162.

[47] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 29, 1914.

[48] Ibid.; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 29, 1914, p. 159; CT #113, Commander-in-Chief to Commander English Forces, October 1, 1914, 3:00 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 1754 and n. 1, p. 511; "Relations between French and English Commands, (Résumé)," [March 1915], AG,

The next morning, in "a very different atmosphere," Joffre, attended by Belin and Berthelot, "took command" in the discussion with Wilson and Huguet.[49] Baited by Wilson's promise of greater British participation, Joffre agreed in principle to moving the BEF north because of "the great advantage" it would entail of relieving French railways and "above all to give the Army of Marshal French a freedom of action and a capability (rendement) much superior to that which it currently possesses."[50] Joffre's long-term goal of obtaining maximum participation from the British Force thus led him to accede in principle to British wishes.

Joffre, however, did not consider the moment opportune for the immediate transfer of the entire BEF. Because of the width of its front on the Aisne, the British Force could not be relieved simply by an extension of the flanks of the neighbouring French armies. New French forces would have to be brought in from other parts of the front to effect the relief. This secondary movement, he argued in a memorandum to Sir John, would require additional transports and result in a vital loss of time.[51] The British ought, therefore, to follow the French example of moving north only those forces freed by the fortification and thinning of the line. One British corps and one cavalry division would thus become available to join the two British divisions soon to arrive at

---

16N1905, GQG, EM, 3rd Bur., Dos. #1, Armée Anglaise, #34.

[49] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 30, 1914.

[50] #8095, "Note of General Joffre, Commander-in-Chief, to Marshal French, Commander of the British Army," September 30, 1914, AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 1679; cf. Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 31, 1914.

[51] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 30, 1914, p. 163; #8095, Note of General Joffre, Commander-in-Chief, to Marshal French, Commander of the British Army, September 30, 1914, AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 1679.

Dunkirk from Great Britain. Together they could march on Lille, an objective of very great importance to the French. The Indian divisions, one of which was already in France, would also be moved by rail to the concentration area when ready for action. The two remaining British corps on the Aisne, however, should remain there, Joffre argued, until an Allied advance in that sector shortened the line, allowing the French to take up the British portion of the line without bringing in new forces.[52] If, on the other hand, such an advance on the Aisne were to fail, Joffre assured Wilson, he was "quite ready" to have the BEF "move across to the left" "as he could get corps to replace" it.[53]

While Wilson, by the force of his arguments and the power of his persuasive personality, had obtained French assent to the principle of moving the BEF north, Joffre, in practical terms, actually conceded very little. Only slightly more than one-third of the BEF would proceed north immediately to engage in conjunction with French troops: Transfer of the remaining two corps from the Aisne would depend on the outcome of events. The conversation, moreover, had been less than frank, for, problems of transports apart, the greater stumbling block to relieving the entire BEF, as Berthelot revealed in the privacy of his diary, had not been discussed. "With their methodical slowness," he wrote of the British, "will they understand the necessity of rapidly engaging successive divisions as their debarkations take place."[54] The whole French manoeuvre would depend on the British meeting this still unspecified condition.

---

[52] #8095, "Note of General Joffre, Commander-in-Chief, to Marshal French, Commander of the British Army," September 30, 1914, AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 1679; cf. Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 30, 1914, p. 163; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 30, 1914.

[53] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 30, 1914; for directives on the proposed "push" see CT Commander-in-Chief to Commander VIth Army, 30 September, 1914, 9:40 a.m. and Tel. message #8026, Commander-in-Chief to Commanders, IVth, IXth, Vth, VIth Armies, 29 September, [1914], between 10:15 and 10:45 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(II), nos. 1672, 1612.

Sir John, nevertheless, who had agreed in advance of Wilson's trip to step-by-step transfer of his Army, was satisfied. Upon Wilson's return, he readily agreed to withdraw the II Corps from the centre of his line without reinforcements from the French and to prepare the cavalry division and infantry brigade held in reserve for transportation to the north. Apparently nurturing the hope that the advance of the line on the Aisne would not long delay the transport of his remaining corps, he made no demands for their earlier transfer. The British Government, he told Joffre, would be asked to send the 7th and 8th Divisions to Boulogne or Le Havre in order to have them concentrate on Lille, as Joffre had suggested.[55] The understanding appeared complete. "A real good day's work," wrote Wilson in his diary, expressing satisfaction at the compromise agreement which he alone had been able to arrange. But the arrangement was much more fragile than Wilson supposed and would soon be shattered by events.[56]

---

[54] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of September 30, 1914, p. 163. That the British agree to engage each division as it arrived was to have been one of the stipulations of the agreement (Ibid.), but neither Wilson's diary entry nor Joffre's official reply made any mention of this condition. Wilson may have been asked privately to take up this sensitive matter with Sir John (see below), or it may have simply been ignored in view of the fact that only a small portion of the BEF was being transferred into the flanking line.

[55] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 29, 1914; Note of Field Marshal Commander-in-Chief of the British Army to His Excellency The Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies, September 30, 1914, AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 1681.

[56] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 30, 1914. A technical difficulty arose immediately when Joffre indicated on October 1 that transports could not be made available for the II

Allied Response to the German Bombardment of Antwerp, September 28 - October 2

On the night of September 27-28, the Germans began the systematic reduction of Antwerp, opening fire with 17-inch howitzers on the outer ring of outdated forts which guarded the inner line of the fortification.[57] German strategy, like that of the French after the stalemate on the Aisne, had been to act on the enemy flank. The initial bid to destroy the French Army having failed, the new objective of the German Command was the Channel "coast on which the right flank was to rest, and from which it was hoped to obstruct England's Channel traffic, effectively attack the island itself and turn the French flank."[58] On September 9 the Kaiser had ordered the reduction of Antwerp. Erich von Falkenhayn, who replaced Moltke as Chief of the German General Staff on September 14, fully agreed. This "threat to the rear" which stood in the way of German occupation of the Channel ports "had to be removed at all costs."[59] Accordingly, the "biggest guns that the German General Staff could spare" were sent "with all haste" to General Hans H. von Beseler commanding the operation.[60]

Corps until October 5 and that the cavalry division would have to trek overland as French cavalry had done. (Note of the Commander-in-Chief relative to the transport of British Forces, October 1, 1914, [4:00 p.m.], AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 1756 and n. 4, p. 493. Cf. Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of October 1, 1914, p. 165.)

[57] For accounts of the siege of Antwerp, see Wanty, L'art de la guerre, II, 128-31; Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 335-59; HGW (1914), I, 127-67; Reichsarchiv, Der Weltkrieg, V, 221-44; Joseph Trainor, "Antwerp, 1914," War Monthly, [1977], no. 41, pp. 8-17.

[58] Falkenhayn, General Headquarters, pp. 12, 27-28.

[59] Ibid., pp. 1, 12; HGW (1914), II, 32, n. 1.

[60] Trainor, "Antwerp, 1914," p. 9; Falkenhayn, General Headquarters, pp. 12-13.

The German attack on Antwerp sent reverberations in every direction. To the British Government, the defence of Antwerp was of fundamental importance. The strategic value of the great port for the British was later described by Winston Churchill in terms not far different from those expressed by the German Command.

> Antwerp was not only the sole stronghold of the Belgian nation; it was the true left flank of the Allied front in the west. It guarded the whole line of Channel ports. It threatened the flanks and rear of the German armies in France.[61]

Like Wellington a century earlier, Churchill considered defence of the Channel ports the most vital of British interests, and it was therefore essential that the fortress hold as long as possible.[62]

To the Belgians, the German threat to their last major stronghold behind which King Leopold's Army had retreated after the fall of Brussels was a matter of life and death. Faced with the imminent collapse of the outer ring of forts on September 30, the Belgian Government urgently requested, in return for services rendered, the military "aid and protection" of both the British and the French.[63] The Belgians, of course, had a good case, for the Belgian Army had not only immobilized two German corps before Antwerp by an initial sortie on August 24-26, but had prevented withdrawal of German forces by a second attack on September 9 at the height of the Marne offensive. As recently as September 25-27, they had again sallied forth, at French request, to harass German communications.[64] Their service to the Allied cause had been considerable.

---

[61] Churchill, *The World Crisis*, I, 332.

[62] *Ibid.*, p. 333-34; cf. Elizabeth Longford, *Wellington*, Vol. I: *The Years of the Sword* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), pp. 406-07; Michael Glover, *Wellington as Military Commander* (London: B. T. Balsford, 1968), pp. 188-89.

[63] CT #1532/G, 1537/G, War to General Staff, [Romilly] *GQG* , October 1, [1914], 12:15 a.m., 1:25 a.m., *AFGG*, I(IV) A(II), no. 1747; Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 459; T. Minister of War to Staff, Romilly, October 1, 1914, 1:45 p.m., *AFGG*, I(IV) A(II), no. 1748.

The French Government, however, found itself in an awkward position. They were, of course, sympathetic to the Belgian cause: The loss of Antwerp, a place of great strategic value, would be a terrible "gage" in the hands of the Germans and produce a dramatic effect on public opinion.[65] But the French Cabinet was not prepared to ask Joffre to withdraw regular forces engaged in the delicate flanking manoeuvre against the German Army for the relief of the fortress. "For political reasons of the highest order," the French Government instead promised the Belgians on October 1 the support of a territorial division and at the same time proposed that the British, too, contribute a division for the relief of the fortress.[66] By contributing one territorial division, the French Government, in effect, hoped to have the British, whose interests were more directly threatened, play the major role in holding the fortress. But even the request for the diversion of one territorial division for the support of the Belgians met with resistance from the French Command.[67]

Guided by purely military considerations, Joffre's Staff was adamantly opposed to any operation for the relief of Antwerp. Believing wholly in the efficacy of field operations, Joffre, who placed little value on the role of fortresses in the first place, had no confidence in the ability of the outmoded fortifications of the Antwerp system to resist the bombardment of German heavy artillery. Assuming that Antwerp would fall in short order, his chief concern was to persuade the Belgian Government to have their Army avoid capture by evacuating the area at once, leaving behind only the regular fortress garrison, and then to join up on the left with the large Allied force concentrating north of Arras. This strategy he strongly urged on the Belgian Government on October 1, contrary to the French Government's hope of raising an expedition to lift the siege.[68] Government and Command thus worked at cross-purposes on the issue. The French Command was even more at odds with the strategic policy of the British Government, which favoured holding the fortress just as long as possible.

---

[64] Wanty, L'art de la guerre, II, 129; Berthelot, Diary, I, entries of September 26, 29, 1914, pp. 154, 158; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 459-60; HGW (1914), I, 460; Falkenhayn, General Headquarters, p. 12.

[65] Herbillon, Souvenirs, I, entry of October 1, 1914, (conversation with Viviani), pp. 46-47; Poincaré, Au service, V, 339-40.

[66] Poincaré, Au service, V, 339-40; CT #134/G, War to Staff, Romilly-sur-Seine, October 1, [1914], 1:40 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 1747; Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 335-36.

[67] See CT 1513/G, War to [GQG], September 29, [1914], 1:00 p.m., CT #7963, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, September 29, [1914], 5:30 p.m., CT #134/G, War to Staff, Romilly-sur-Seine, October 1, [1914], 1:40 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(II), nos. 1603, 1610, 1747. See below for a detailed treatment.

The British Government responded with alarm to the German bombardment of the vital port. On September 29, Kitchener sent Colonel Dallas, a Staff officer, to Antwerp to investigate directly. On the evening of October 1, Dallas reported that unless a diversion were made on the flank of the besieging German forces, the Belgian stronghold would soon fall.[69] That alarming report catapulted Kitchener into action. As the Belgian Field Army of five divisions (80,000 men) and 70,000 fortress troops were being attacked by the equivalent of only 2½ German corps (90,000 men) of varying quality, the possibility of relieving the fortress by an Anglo-French expedition seemed well within the realm of possibility. Kitchener therefore advised the Cabinet on October 2 that if effective cooperation in the form of regular troops could be obtained from the French, he was prepared to send an expedition for the relief of Antwerp using regular forces which had earlier been earmarked for France.[70]

---

[68] CT #47, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, October 1, 1914, 10:25 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 1751; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 460-61; Berthelot, Diary, I, entries of October 1, 2, 1914, pp. 164-65, 167-68.

[69] Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 335-36;Cassar,Kitchener,p.242.

He therefore pushed immediately for a joint expedition. The 7th Division, Kitchener informed the French, would not go to a French port, as promised, but to Antwerp. But, insisted Kitchener, as a condition of sending this division, the French must also send a good active division and not the territorial division offered.[71] At the same time, Kitchener urged Sir John, in connection with the disengagement of the BEF from the Aisne, to make arrangements with Joffre for the dispatch of "whatever portion of your force is considered necessary for the relief of Antwerp."[72] That request had a resounding impact.

Antwerp and the Move North

Kitchener's strategy of relieving Antwerp not only conflicted directly with Joffre's field strategy, but his request for the concentration of the BEF in support of the Antwerp expedition also upset the fragile arrangement between the French and British Commands for the step-by-step transfer of the BEF north. As a result of Kitchener's request for the support of the BEF for the operation, Sir John again sent Wilson to GQG on October 3, just three days after his earlier visit, this time "to say either the whole of our army pulls out or none of it." The "news about Antwerp is disturbing," wrote Wilson, "& we must get up on the Lys as soon as we can."[73]

---

[70] Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 335-37; Cassar, Kitchener, p. 242; cf. Joffre, Mémoires, I, 464. Wanty, L'art de la guerre, II, 129 gives German strength as 120,000.

[71] CT Bordeaux to General Staff, Romilly, October 2, 1914, 12:15 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 1820 and n. 1, p. 54; Cassar, Kitchener, p. 242; cf. Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 337-38; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 463-64; CT #1550/G, [French Minister of] War to [French] General Staff, [2] October, [1914], 12:30 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 1821.

[72] Arthur, Kitchener, III, 67-68; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 463; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entries of October 2, 3, 1914.

Wilson's second visit brought the issue of British division-by-division engagement out into the open. Expressing Sir John's desire to see the "whole of the English Army follow the movement of the 2nd Corps,"[74] Wilson, who saw only Belin and Berthelot (Joffre being absent),[75] also "warned the Major General that the intention of the Commander of the English Army was to wait until all his forces were joined together before engaging them."[76] Charmed by the candor and indiscretion of Wilson, Berthelot praised his open-mindedness. "He is a serious, intelligent man," he wrote, "who tries to resolve difficulties rather than replying no to everything one proposes!"[77] The reference to Murray and Sir John was clear enough.

The French Command put their condition for the removal of the BEF very plainly to Sir John in a carefully reasoned note. They agreed to move the BEF to the outer flank as rapidly as possible. The II Corps, the first to be transported, would arrive in the zone St. Omer - Hazebrouck (moved back from Lille because of the advance of German cavalry) on October 8, and the III Corps, relieved on the 6th by a French division, would arrive on the 12th, ready to act on the 13th. The remaining I Corps would be relieved and transported "as soon as possible"; the remaining British cavalry division would travel overland. But, since the transport of the BEF would prevent the movement by rail of French troops to the north for nearly ten days, it was of "capital importance" that British forces cooperate immediately in the manoeuvre "to stop and outflank the German right wing." British divisions, the French insisted, would therefore be required to engage "one after another as they arrive," without waiting for the whole force to assemble.[78] The cards were finally on the table.

---

[73] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entries of October 2, 3, 1914.

[74] #791, Note of the Commander-in-Chief to Marshal French with regard to the transport of British Forces, October 4, 1914, AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 1835.

[75] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 3, 1914.

[76] Note of Commander-in-Chief to the President of the Republic with regard to the transport of British Forces, October 4, 1914, AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 2010. (Wilson may have used this as an argument to convince the French to transport the entire BEF.)

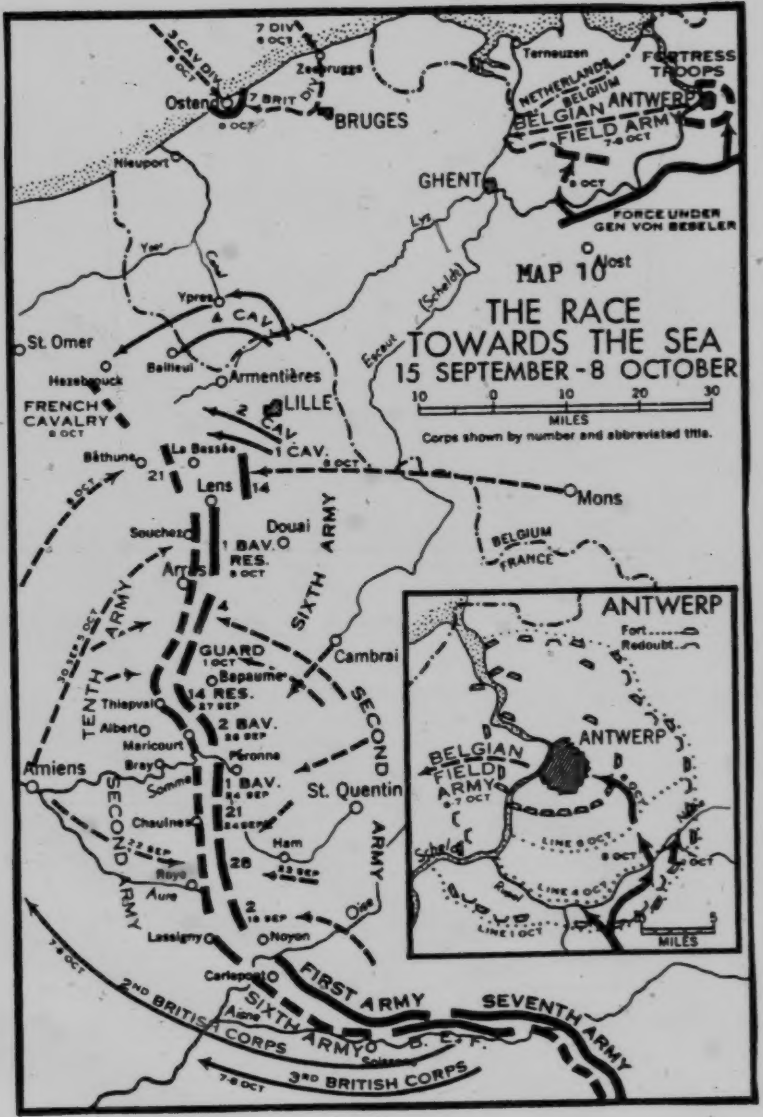
[77] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of October 3, 1914, p. 170.

Not convinced, moreover, that their argument for division-by-division engagement of the BEF would be successful, the French Command again turned to the Government for support. In a closely reasoned document (accompanied by a copy of his letter to Sir John), Joffre set the entire French case before Poincaré, and asked that he "use his wide influence with Lord Kitchener to assure" that the English divisions engage "successively on debarkation," "without waiting until their concentration was entirely complete."[79] Disagreement on military matters had

---

[78] No. 791, Note of the Commander-in-Chief to Marshal French, with regard to the transport of British troops, October 4, 1914, AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 2002; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 3, 1914; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of October 4, 1914, pp. 171-72. See Map 10, p. 358. Part of the British delay in arrival was due to the three days' march from their position in the line on the Aisne to the railroad at Pont-Ste-Maxence. (No. 791, supra.) See Map 10, p. 358.

[79] Note of the Commander-in-Chief to the President of the Republic


MAP 10
THE RACE TOWARDS THE SEA
15 SEPTEMBER - 8 OCTOBER
10 0 10 20 30
MILES
Corps shown by number and abbreviated title.
3 CAV DIV 8 OCT
7 DIV 6 OCT
Zeebrugge
7 BRIT DIV
Ostend
8 OCT
BRUGES
Terneuzen
FORTRESS TROOPS
NETHERLANDS
BELGIUM
BELGIAN ANTWERP
FIELD ARMY 7-8 OCT
9 OCT
GHENT
FORCE UNDER GEN VON BESELER
Nieuport
Yser
Canal
Lys
(Scheldt)
Escaut
Alost
Ypres
4 CAV
St. Omer
Bailleul
Hazebrouck
Armentières
LILLE
FRENCH CAVALRY 8 OCT
2 CAV
1 CAV.
8 OCT
Béthune
La Bassée
21
Lens
14
Mons
BELGIUM
FRANCE
Souchez
Douai
1 BAV. RES. 8 OCT
Arras
SIXTH ARMY
5 OCT
4
GUARD 1 OCT
Cambrai
Bapaume
14 RES. 27 SEP
30 SEP-3 OCT
TENTH ARMY
Thiepval
Albert
Maricourt
2 BAV. 26 SEP
Péronne
SECOND ARMY
Amiens
Bray
Somme
1 BAV. 24 SEP
St. Quentin
21 24 SEP
Chaulnes
SECOND ARMY
22 SEP
Ham
23 SEP
28
Roye
Avre
2 18 SEP
Oise
Lassigny
Noyon
7-8 OCT
Carlepont
FIRST ARMY
SEVENTH ARMY
2ND BRITISH CORPS
SIXTH ARMY
Aisne
B. E. F.
Soissons
3RD BRITISH CORPS
7-8 OCT
ANTWERP
Fort
Redoubt
ANTWERP
BELGIAN FIELD ARMY 6-7 OCT
Scheldt
LINE 6 OCT
8 OCT
LINE 4 OCT
Rupel
LINE 1 OCT
MILES

Adapted from Canada, The Historical Section, General Staff, The Western Front, 1914 (Ottawa, Queen's Printer, 1957), p. 133.

thus reached a new and decisive turn after the apparent cordiality of the Marne. By appealing to the politicians, Joffre, in effect, admitted that a serious difference had arisen with the British Command.

As on the Marne, the success of the operation would again depend on the British. In the north, the outer British flank would be exposed to all the risks and dangers of offensive warfare. For the British to act aggressively under such conditions of risk seemed entirely foreign to the French image of the British as "unaggressive" and unsuited to offensive warfare. Joffre, therefore, sought the coercive influence of the British Government in resolving his dispute with Sir John. In French eyes the issue was of fundamental importance.

The Political-Military Conference of October 5, 1914

At a political-military conference at British Headquarters at Fère-en-Tardenois of October 5, 1914, attended by Poincaré, Millerand, Joffre and Sir John, the real differences of opinion, however, appeared to exist between Kitchener and Sir John over the question of an independent command for the Antwerp expedition.[80] The Commander of the BEF, moreover, showed himself to be in substantial agreement with the French Command on the strategy for the defence of Belgium. The conflict between Sir John and Joffre was momentarily obscured as Sir John sought French support in resolving his dispute with Kitchener.

The tone of the conference was cordial throughout. Received by

---

with regard to the transport of British Forces, October 4, 1914, AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 2010; see [3rd Bureau] "Note on the Mission confided to the English Army, October, 1914," AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 2009 (and n. 3, p. 674) which recommends an appeal to Poincaré.

[80] Poincaré Papers, XXXVII, BN, NAF (16028), "Notes Journalières," entry of October 9, 1914 (recounting events of October 5, 1914), pp. 126-27; cf. Poincaré, Au service, I, 354-55, 358.

a guard of honour, the French visitors joined with Sir John in his "little house" where, "although the weather was not yet very cold," observed Poincaré, with meticulous detail, "a great fire burned in the fireplace." In the end everyone drank a glass of champagne "to the health of the English Army."[81]

Ever intent upon decisive action on the German flank, Joffre was most anxious to have Sir John promise to engage his forces in the north according to the French plan. Before the meeting, he asked Poincaré "to intervene personally with Marshal French so that English troops transported to the left wing would engage as soon as debarked."[82] The question became associated with the whole question of Allied strategy for the defence of Antwerp, and Sir John reminded Joffre of his commitment to do "his utmost to effect the relief of Antwerp at the earliest possible moment." This, he said, reflecting his own predilection for action on Antwerp (as expressed prior to the campaign) and the wishes of the British Government, "must be considered paramount in everything."[83]

In the end, however, Sir John agreed with Joffre's concept of "indirect support" of the Belgians, rejecting Kitchener's plan of sending part of the BEF directly to relieve Antwerp. "I have every reason to believe," he wired Kitchener, reflecting Joffre's line of reasoning, "that my successive support of the French by corps or divisions will be the course that is best calculated to achieve this result" [the relief of Antwerp].[84] In agreeing to the French plan, Sir John also, of course, was able to keep all troops of the BEF directly under his command.

---

[81] Poincaré Papers, XXXVII, BN, NAF (16028), "Notes Journalières," entry of October 9, 1914 (recounting events of October 5, 1914), pp. 123-27.

[82] Ibid., p. 127.

[83] T F301, French to Kitchener, 6 October, 1914, Kitchener Office Papers, PRO, WO/159/14; cf. Note of Field Marshal Sir John French to Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies, 5 October, 1914, AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2129.

On the question of the piecemeal engagement of British units, Sir John thus appeared very cooperative. "He is in agreement with Joffre," Poincaré recorded cheerfully, "and promises that the troops will engage on the left wing as they arrive."[85] "But, but . . ., let's wait!" wrote the ever-suspicious Berthelot.[86] And indeed, while he had given up his earlier insistence on total concentration of the BEF before marching, Sir John, in a written statement of the same day (perhaps after the conference), persisted on engaging by larger units. In fact, he agreed only to engage corps-by-corps, rather than division-by-division, as the French had requested.[87] Thus, one British division in each corps would stand idle until the second division arrived. Neither Joffre's insistence nor Poincaré's persuasion (nor Kitchener's later intervention) were able to move Sir John from this position. The French therefore had to be content with a compromise solution.

The British, moreover, again demanded the immediate transfer of the remaining British corps from the Aisne to effect the reunion of the entire force, a matter of "vast importance" according to Sir John.[88] Later the same day, moreover, the zone of concentration of the BEF upon which depended the efficacy of British action also became a serious bone of contention between the two commands.[89] Thus, the conference, while preserving a facade of unity, had not fully resolved the issue. The lines of conflict remained very much drawn and the basic question of British performance in the field, promises aside, had yet to be resolved.

---

[84] T F301, French to Kitchener, 6 October, 1914, Kitchener Office Papers, PRO, WO/159/14; Note on the Mission confided to the English Army, [on or before 4] October, 1914, AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 2009; cf. Note of Field Marshal Sir John French to Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies, 5 October, 1914, AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2129.

[85] Poincaré Papers, XXXVII, BN, NAF (16028), "Notes Journalières," entry of October 9, 1914, p. 127.

[86] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of October 5, 1914, p. 176.

[87] Note of Field Marshal French to the Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies, 5 October 1914, AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2129. See also n. 1, p. 17.

As on the Marne, moreover, Joffre's use of the diplomatic channel to impose his will on Sir John had the boomerang effect of causing further conflict in Sir John's relations with both Kitchener and himself. In predictable fashion, Kitchener promptly relayed Joffre's demand for the immediate engagement of each division to Sir John "for his observation."[90] "I have already assured General Joffre that his wishes in this respect will be met," Sir John replied to Kitchener on October 6, reflecting his acute annoyance at "being much hampered by interference from home."[91] The brunt of his anger, however, was reserved for Joffre, who had acted covertly on the matter. Kitchener's telegram, according to Wilson, explicitly "said that Joffre had urged [that British] divisions be employed as they came up," which, coupled with the difficulty of arranging a proper zone of debarkation, "infuriated Sir John." Upon receiving the telegram, he "sent for Huguet and Riboul [of the French Military Mission] & in front of Murray & me as well," wrote Wilson, "lost his temper & stormed up and down like an idiot."[92] Huguet was then dispatched to GQG to tell Joffre, "in polite language," that Sir John "strongly resented such action on his part," as he (Sir John) "had never yet failed him."[93]

---

[88] Ibid.

[89] See below.

[90] Letter, Asquith to the King, 7 October 1914, PRO, Cab 41/35/50, R/188.

[91] T F301, French to Kitchener, 6 October 1914, Kitchener Office Papers, PRO, WO/159/14; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 6, 1914; Letter, French to Kitchener, 13th October, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/33; Clive Diaries, II/I, KCMA, entry of October 6, 1914.

The incident was closed only after Joffre denied any personal involvement. The politicians, he asserted, had been made aware of the circumstances and had acted on their own initiative. The outward appearance of solidarity and good relations between command was thus preserved,[94] although the reality was quite otherwise. Much hypocrisy and deceit still existed in their relationship which in itself became a further impediment to real understanding, increasing mistrust and suspicions between them.

Sir John's attitude of solidarity with the French on strategic matters at the October 5 conference appears to have been determined, in large part, by his suspicions of Kitchener's intentions. Ever since Kitchener's visit to Paris on September 1, which Sir John had regarded as a gross violation of his independence of command, relations between the two had been very bad. The basic issue was the competition between the Army in the field and Kitchener's massive new armies--"shadow forces," as Wilson called them--for officers. British losses of officers had been especially high during the first month of combat, but Sir John's "urgent" "demands" for replacements could only be partially met.[95] Kitchener's unwillingness to "meet the famine of the moment by devouring the seed corn of the future" was certainly the right approach, but it was keenly resented at British Headquarters where Sir John's aim of winning tomorrow's battles clashed sharply with Kitchener's long-term strategy for winning the war.[96]

---

[92] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 6, 1914.

[93] Letter, French to Kitchener, 13th October, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/33.

[94] "Relations between the French and English Commands (Résumé)," March, 1915, AG, 16N1905, EM, 3rd Bur., Dos. 1, Armée Anglaise #34; #993, Note for the Commander-in-Chief of British Forces, October 6, 1914, AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 89. See also Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 6, 1914; Letter, French to Kitchener, October 13, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/33. Cf. Huguet, Britain and the War, pp. 123-24, who claims the reason for diplomatic intervention was Sir John's inactivity on the Aisne.

The immediate source of discord was Kitchener's decision on October 3, taken without either the advice or knowledge of Sir John, to send the 7th Division to Antwerp under the independent command of Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Rawlinson.[97] Once again fearful that Kitchener intended to set up a second command in France, Sir John reproached him during the conference, not for having sent the 7th Division to defend the vital port, but "for not having established any liaison between English Headquarters and the British troops who are to cooperate with the Belgians in the defence of Antwerp."[98] "French asks me to intervene with the British Government to have removed a state of affairs so contrary to the unity of action," wrote Poincaré, who had Millerand send off a telegram that very evening.[99]

---

[95] See Letter, Asquith to the King, September 16, 1914, PRO, Cab 41/35/44 #R/181; Letter, French to Kitchener, September 19, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/23; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of September 27, 1914.

[96] Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 281-82; Maurice, Lessons, pp. 7-8.

[97] C Tel. message, Huguet to Staff, Romilly, October 4, 1914, 9:30 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 2012; and n. 1, p. 681; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 12, 1914; Letter, French to Kitchener, 13th October, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/33.

[98] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 461; Poincaré Papers, XXXVII, BN, NAF (16028), "Notes Journalières," entry of October 9, 1914, (events of October 5, 1914), p. 127.

To the French President, it appeared that Joffre was on better terms with Sir John than Sir John was with Kitchener, with whom "he hardly gets along."[100] His assessment was not far wrong, for on October 5, Sir John addressed another letter to his old friend Churchill, now at Antwerp, complaining that Kitchener had not placed the expedition for the relief of Antwerp under his command. "I am constantly subjected to these pinpricks by the S[ecretary] of S[tate]," he wrote, "and it makes my very hard & difficult task much harder."[101]

The October 5th conference thus marked a new if inauspicious stage in the military diplomacy of the two commands. For the first time Sir John, contrary to the wishes of his Government, had adopted an attitude of solidarity with Joffre and the French Government on a strategic matter, seemingly in order to force Kitchener's hand on the command issue. By consorting with the French, Sir John hoped to get his way at home. Acutely aware of the need to maintain at least a facade of understanding with the British since the events of the "Great Retreat," Joffre, for his part, took on an air of solidarity with Sir John at the conference. Using the support of his own Government and that of Kitchener, Joffre nonetheless attempted covertly to line up three of the four main elements in the power equation of two governments and two commands in order to impose his will on Sir John on the question of division-by-division engagement of the BEF. Both Joffre and Sir John thus showed a marked tendency to intrigue, taking advantage of the diffusion of power within the coalition to achieve their immediate ends.

---

[99] Poincaré Papers, XXXVII, BN, NAF (16028), "Notes Journalières," entry of October 9, 1914, (events of October 5,) p. 127.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Letter, Sir John French to Winston S. Churchill, 5 October, 1914, in Gilbert, Churchill, III, Companion, I, 168-69.

The French Command, however, benefited the most from Sir John's conflict with Kitchener. Had Sir John and Kitchener been working in close harmony, as in the British demand for the transfer of the BEF north, the French would have been under much pressure to agree to Kitchener's wishes with regard to the defence of Antwerp. But the rift between Sir John and Kitchener on the command issue seemingly led Sir John to side with the French on their strategy of indirect support. And Kitchener, because of his mistrust of Sir John and his leaning toward solidarity with Joffre, was only too ready to support Joffre on the question of engaging the BEF by successive divisions. The French Command, which enjoyed the willing support of the French Government, was thus able in each instance to exploit the conflict between Sir John and Kitchener to its own advantage. Sir John's lack of solidarity with Kitchener thus became an important factor in the advancement of French military dominance of the coalition.

Kitchener, however, seriously resented Sir John's new procedure, which to him smacked of French interference in British Government policy. The British forces in Belgium, he explained to Sir John on October 10, had not been placed under him initially because communications with London were so much better and because the dispatch of the 7th Division had been a temporary measure. Once its long-term deployment had been approved by the Cabinet, on October 9, the forces in Belgium had been placed under Sir John's command.[102] Kitchener thus resented Joffre's renewed demands on October 9 and 10 that Rawlinson be subordinated to Sir John.[103] "As regards the big question raised by Joffre," wrote Kitchener to Sir John on October 11, finally perceiving the nature of Sir John's apprehension, "you may assure him that His Majesty's Government have too much confidence in you, not to place all troops . . . to take part in the main operation . . . under your orders."[104] In Kitchener's view, however, Joffre's demands raised a serious constitutional question with regard to British sovereignty.[105] The British Government, he affirmed, "must maintain their right to determine the general policy on which [British troops] are employed and under whose orders they shall act."[106] That was a significant warning.

---

[102] Letter, Kitchener to French, 10-10-14, Kitchener Papers, PRO,

Kitchener's expression of confidence in Sir John and his subordination of Rawlinson to the Commander of the BEF did a great deal to clear the air between them. But Sir John, unwilling to admit his intrigue with the French, denied knowledge of "any communication Joffre was making."[107] Like Joffre, Sir John, for the sake of preserving the appearance of solidarity with Kitchener, was not prepared to admit his covert manipulations of the system. But the information received by

---

30 57/49 WA/30.

[103] CT #1925, 2141, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, 9 October, 1914, 6:00 p.m., 10 October, 1914, 6:00 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), nos. 2479, 2545. See below, pp. 378-83.

[104] Letter, Kitchener to French, 11-10-14, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/32.

[105] Letter, Kitchener to French, 10-10-14, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/30.

[106] Letter, Kitchener to French, 11-10-14, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/32. This statement must be placed in the context of Anglo-French conflict over the strategy for the defence of Antwerp. (See below, pp. 378-83.)

[107] Letter, French to Kitchener, October 13, 1914, Kitchener Pa-

Kitchener obviously put the lie to this denial.[108] The facade of understanding was thus undermined, as in Joffre's relationship with Sir John, by hypocrisy and intrigue, adding further stress to an already difficult personal relationship. Sir John had obtained his wishes on the command question but at a very high cost in personal relations with the Secretary of State for War.

British Strategy for the Defence of Antwerp versus French Field Strategy, October 1-10, 1914

On the question of sending an expedition for the relief of Antwerp, the conflict between the French Command and the British Government was even more overt. After October 2, every energy of the British Government was directed toward mounting an expedition and delaying the fall of the fortress. Joffre's chief concern, on the other hand, was to persuade the Belgian Government to have their Army avoid capture by evacuating the area at once, leaving behind only the regular fortress garrison, and then to join up on the left with the large Allied forces concentrating north of Arras.[109]

Even before learning of Kitchener's proposal of an Anglo-French relieving expedition on October 2, Joffre stoutly resisted, in numerous telegrams, the proposal of his own Government on October 1 to send a territorial division from Le Havre to Ostend for relief of the Belgians. That division should be sent to Dunkirk, he argued, where it could act

---

pers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/33.

[108] See letter, Kitchener to French, 11-10-14, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/32.

[109] CT #47, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, October 1, [1914], 10:25 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 1751; Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 460-61; Berthelot, *Diary*, I, entries of October 1, 2, 1914, pp. 164-65, 167-68.

in conjunction with other French forces and still join up with the Belgian Army, which, he insisted, must leave Antwerp.[110] Under Government pressure, however, he yielded, sending this third line division to Ostend, but only on condition that it join up at Ghent with Belgian forces leaving Antwerp and in order to obtain the British division being requested by the French Government. One territorial division, he protested, would provide no material aid, just moral support.[111] And although Joffre proposed the next day that a second territorial division from Paris join the first to render French aid less illusory, the Brigade of *Fusiliers Marins* eventually sent in its place was deployed, as Berthelot revealed, merely "to give the appearance of satisfying the Government within the means at our disposal."[112]

Joffre's resistance to Kitchener's proposed expedition for the relief of Antwerp was even more adamant. No active division could be withdrawn from the manoeuvre in progress, he wired his Government on October 2, flatly refusing Kitchener's request. The French contribution would consist of a territorial division sent by rail from Calais or Dunkirk and a Brigade of *Fusiliers Marins* (instead of a second territorial division) to be sent by the same means to Antwerp.

---

[110] CT #1534, War to General Staff, Romilly-sur-Seine, October 1, [1914], 1:40 a.m., *AFGG*, I(IV) A(II), no. 1747; T. #46, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, October 1, 1914, 10:20 a.m., *AFGG*, I(IV) A(II), p. 487, n. 2; CT #47, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, October 1, 1914, 10:25 a.m., *AFGG*, I(IV) A(II), no. 1751; Berthelot, *Diary*, I, entry of October 1, 1914, p. 164.

[111] CT #1541/F, War to General Staff, Romilly, October 1, [1914], 5:00 p.m., *AFGG*, I(IV) A(II), no. 1749; CT #203, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, October 1, 1914, 9:00 p.m., *AFGG*, I(IV) A(II), no. 1760.

[112] CT #332, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, October 2, 1914, 12:30 p.m., *AFGG*, I(IV) A(II), no. 1828; Berthelot, *Diary*, I, entry of October 4, 1914, p. 173.

"I insist also, in particular," he wrote, "on the importance of not transporting the English Seventh Division to Antwerp." The 7th and 8th Divisions, he affirmed in this message intended for Kitchener, had been requested by agreement with Sir John to land at Boulogne in order to join up with the rest of the BEF coming up from the Aisne. Reiterating his earlier views on the danger of the Belgian Army being pinned down in the fortress, he strongly urged that the relieving forces and the Belgian Army join forces away from the fortress and keep open their line of retreat to the Allied left. "The best aid that we can give the Belgian Army," he concluded, was the success of "the manoeuvre currently being executed" which, by concentrating large forces in the region of Courtrai, Lille and Hazebrouck, would allow juncture with the Belgian Army at Ghent.[113]

In the background of Joffre's opposition to an expedition for the relief of Antwerp was a related grievance. In response to the French request of September 18 for British forces at Dunkirk (as earlier offered by the British), the British Government had sent a marine brigade but no territorials as hoped for by the French.[114] Now unable to extend their flank to Antwerp for want of forces or the means to transport them, the French Command made a specific request for British territorial divisions at Dunkirk.[115] "They claim to keep them [at home] in case the enemy should arrive at Zeebrugge, Ostend, Dunkirk, Calais and Boulogne," noted Berthelot. But, rejecting the entire concept of British home defence, he queried whether "the best defence of English soil" would not be to prevent the Germans from arriving in these ports by immediately dispatching "these available divisions" to the appropriate front.[116] Kitchener, however, to that point had not considered territorials fit for effective home defence, let alone service in the field. The New Regular Armies then being recruited were being reserved for the latter role.

---

[113] CT, Bordeaux to General Staff, Romilly, [October 2, 1914], 12:15 p.m., CT #1550/G, War to General Staff, 12 [2] October, 1914, 12:30 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(II), nos. 1820, 1821 and n. 1, p. 54; CT #401, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, October 2, 1914, 5:40-6:10 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 1835; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of October 2, 1914, pp. 167-68.

[114] Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 321; CT #5819, Commander-in-Chief to War Minister, September 18, [1914], 9:57 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(I), no. 396; CT #6519, Commander-in-Chief to Huguet, September 21, [1914], 1:45 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(I), no. 708; CT #7963, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, September 29, [1914], 6:42 p.m., AE, Série "Guerre 1914-1918," #534, p. 97 (reproduced in AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 1610.)

Despite the clash of French military strategy with the dictates of British policy, Kitchener was not deterred. When he heard very late on the night of October 2 of Belgian intention to begin withdrawal of their Army from the fortress (as Joffre had urged), Kitchener, in Asquith's absence, called an emergency meeting of key Cabinet ministers, Grey and Churchill. In an attempt to avert the disaster, the Belgians were promised the Brigade of Royal Marines at Dunkirk for the next day, and exhorted to hold out until further reinforcements arrived. At the same time, Churchill volunteered to go to Antwerp to prop up Belgian resistance and to determine what further might be done for its defence.[117]

Kitchener then threw his whole energy on October 3 into the creation of an expeditionary force for the relief of the vital port. Accepting with some reluctance the reduced French offer of one territorial division and one marine brigade instead of two territorial divisions, he committed all available British forces, the 7th Division (despite Joffre's protests), the 3rd Cavalry Division, and, upon Churchill's request from Antwerp, two brigades of partly-trained naval reserves forming the Royal Naval Division, bringing the total expeditionary force to 53,000 men.[118] After landing at Zeebrugge on October 6-7, the British force was to march on Antwerp under the independent command of Lieutenant-General Henry Rawlinson, who was instructed to establish contact with French forces landing at Ostend.[119] The expedition was thus launched over Joffre's protest and with only token French support.

---

[115] CT #7963, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, September 29, [1914], 6:42 p.m.; Minister of War to Minister of Foreign Affairs, September 30, 1914, AE, Série "Guerre 1914-1918," #534, pp. 97, 96; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of October 2, 1914, p. 168.

[116] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of October 2, 1914, p. 168.

[117] Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 338-41; Cassar, Kitchener, p. 243.

Churchill's mission to Antwerp was a further source of embarrassment to the French Command. Prior to his arrival there, the Belgian Government, despite their natural tendency to cling to the fortress, had accepted Joffre's advice to begin the withdrawal of their Army from Antwerp toward Ostend in order to join up with the Allied left.[120] But by the force of his personality and the optimistic promise of exaggerated Allied military aid (100,000 men in ten days, according to French sources), Churchill managed to persuade the Belgian Cabinet on October 3 to defer the evacuation of the fortress by at least three days, pending further aid.[121]

---

[118] Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 341-45; CT #1571/C, T #1572/G, Minister of War to General Staff, Romilly, October 3, 1914, October 4, 1914, 11:00 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 1903, 1986 and ns. 1-2, p. 669; CT #1579/G, War to General Staff, Romilly, October 5, [1914], 2:15 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2106.

[119] CT #1579-80, War to General Staff, Romilly, October 5, [1914], 2:15, 5:30 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), nos. 2106-07.

[120] T #2, War to General Staff, Romilly, October 3, 1914, 1:00 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 1898; T. Minister of War to General Staff, Romilly-sur-Seine, October 3, 1914, 6:20 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 1899; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 462; cf. CT #47, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, October 1, [1914], 10:25 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 175. See Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 343-44.

Joffre persisted in his views. "Tell the King that the Army must not prolong its resistance until in danger of being locked in," Joffre told the Belgian representative at GQG on October 3. "It must not, at any cost, allow itself to be cut off from the Allied Armies," he warned.[122] On October 5, moreover, General Pau was dispatched from GQG to Antwerp with the mission of "assuring as complete cooperation as possible between the Belgian and French Armies" and to assure that Belgian forces leaving Antwerp "continue their march to the southwest of the fortress with Allied forces."[123] His mission essentially was to counteract that of Churchill, whose purpose was to have the Belgians hold on as long as possible.

French military strategy, although basically sound on the question of saving the demoralized Belgian Army, did not make adequate provision for covering its retreat. The French originally offered only the nominal protection of territorials sent from Dunkirk to Ghent.[124] Nor was French timing correct, for immediate evacuation of Antwerp would have allowed the German besiegers to push the Belgians far back along the Channel coast, endangering even the French Channel ports, long before the BEF arrived on the left flank about Ypres in mid-October. British strategy of direct relief and delay in Belgian evacuation of the area would thus serve as a valuable corrective to the French plan and probably prevented the loss of at least a portion of the Channel coast.[125]

---

[121] T #1574, [Minister of War to Commander-in-Chief], October 4, 1914, 12h50, AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 1984, and n. 2, p. 657; Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 343-44.

[122] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of October 3, 1914, p. 170.

[123] Order of Mission given to General Pau at GQG, October 5, 1914, AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2109; Herbillon, Souvenirs, I, entry of October 3, 1914, p. 50; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 462; cf. Weygand, Mémoires, I, 150.

[124] See CT #47, Commander-in-Chief to the Minister of War, October 1, [1914], 10:25 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 1751; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of October 4, 1914, p. 174; see Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 343, on the demoralization of the Belgian Army, left too long without effective support.

The Fall of Antwerp

The conflicting strategies of the British Government and the French Command with regard to Antwerp and the Belgian Army, so evident as Kitchener attempted to set up a relieving expedition, were exacerbated as Joffre, acting in evident bad faith, failed to execute the promises of the French Government. Recriminations were most severe just after the fall of the fortress on October 10.

According to Kitchener's original plan, drawn up upon receipt of French pledges, the British 7th Division and 3rd Cavalry Division were to arrive at Zeebrugge on October 6 and 7 and the French territorial division and a Brigade of Fusiliers Marins were to reach Ostend between October 6 and 9. But, the line of the Nethe, essential to the defence of the inner fortress at Antwerp, fell on October 6, despite the help of the British Marine Brigade, which had arrived two days earlier, and the support of the Royal Naval Division on the 5th. Thus, on October 6, the Belgian Government, in consultation with Churchill and Rawlinson (who then succeeded the former as the military representative of the British Government to the Belgians) decided once again, in view of the danger to the city from artillery bombardment and the "tired and dispirited" state of the Belgian Army, to begin the evacuation of the fortress and the retreat of the Belgian Army toward Ghent. Although Rawlinson still held out the hope of organizing "relieving forces at Ghent and Bruges" which were "to move forward as soon as possible," the fate of the fortress had been sealed. On October 7, the Germans began their attack on the inner line of forts and, two days later, Antwerp capitulated. The relieving expedition (still lacking French forces) had been mounted too late to be of any real help in defence of the fortress. Its fall had probably been delayed four or five days by Churchill's energetic efforts.[126]

---

[125] See Cassar, Kitchener, pp. 248-49; cf. Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 343-64.

The French Command, in the meantime, had dropped the whole idea of participating in the expedition for the relief of Antwerp. On October 6, the 87th Territorial Division, which was to have landed at Ostend in order to march on Ghent, began landing at Dunkirk instead because of alleged problems with debarkation at the Belgian port.[127] Joffre then gave them a new mission, "to hold and organize the St. Omer region" in order to cover "English debarkations" and the left of Maud'huy's new Tenth Army.[128] In his zeal to start the operation against the German flank, Joffre thus ignored both the need to cover the Belgian retreat from Antwerp and the pledge of his Government to the British. When, on October 7, however, the French Command learned of the retreat of the Belgian Army toward Ghent, Joffre finally decided, after consulting with Foch, who had been appointed on October 4 as his assistant for operations in the north of France, to send the territorial division to Poperinghe instead of St. Omer in the hope of joining up with the Belgians.[129]

---

[126] See Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 342-43, 348-59; CT #1594/G, War to General Staff, Romilly-sur-Seine, October 7, [1914], 9:20 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2312; Letter, Asquith to the King, October 9, 1914, PRO, Cab 41/35/51, R/188. See Map 11, p. 377.

[127] CT #1594/G, War to General Staff, Romilly-sur-Seine, October 7, [1914], 9:20 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2312.

[128] CT #1190, Commander-in-Chief to General Foch, October 6, 1914, 1:00 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2213; CT #1191, Commander-in-Chief to Governor Dunkirk, October 6, 1914, 1:05 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 2214 and n. 1, p. 81.

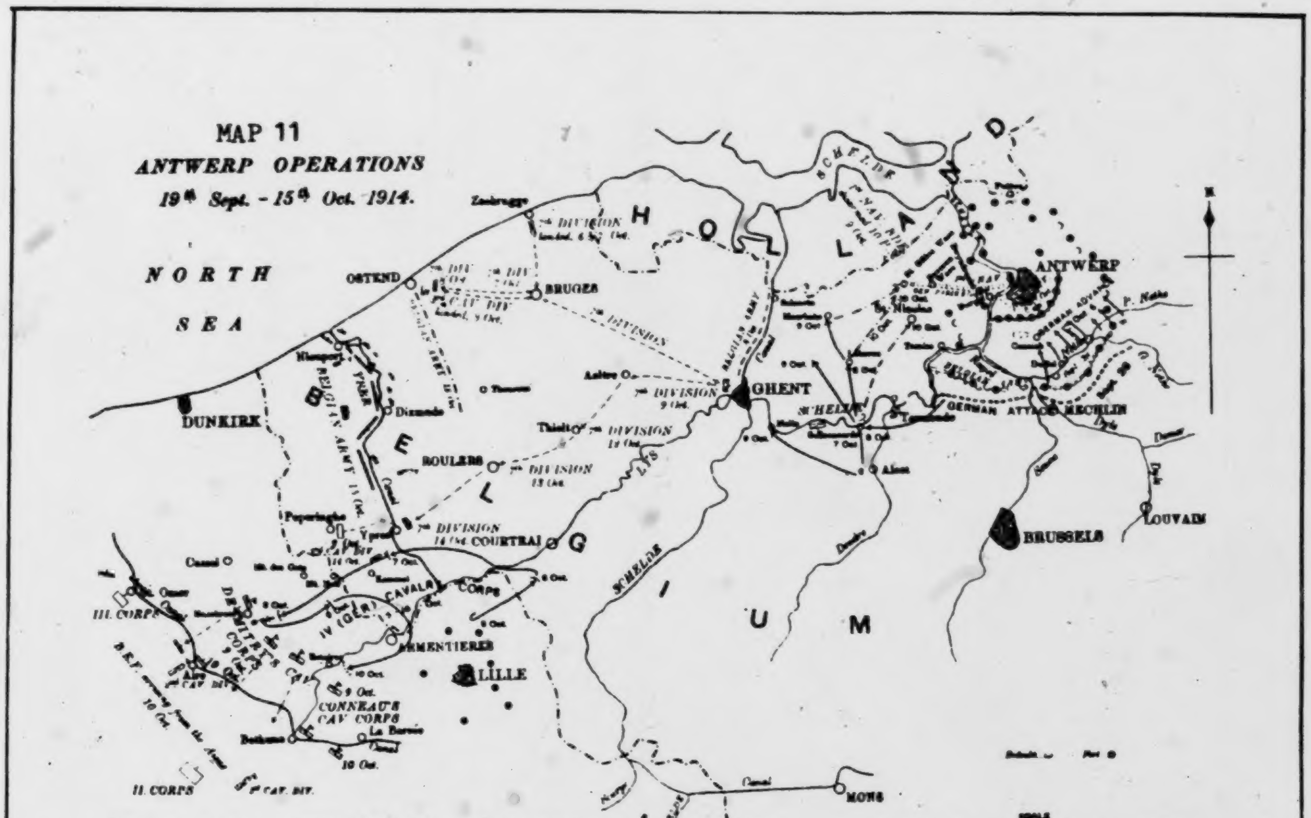
The Brigade of *Fusiliers Marins*, which was to have landed at Ostend on October 6, was still in Paris at that time. Only after an urgent call from Kitchener on the 7th for the immediate dispatch of French troops promised for the defence of Antwerp did the French Command order the *Fusiliers Marins* Brigade to proceed directly by rail from Paris to Antwerp via Dunkirk. Joffre, however, limited their mission to "facilitate the immediate evacuation of the Belgian Field Army and its juncture with Allied forces."[130] Ultimately they were stopped at Ghent by General Pau and, assisted by a few British batallions of Rawlinson's force, they rendered good service on October 9 in warding off German cavalry attempting to thwart the retreat of the Belgian Army.[131] Joffre thus sent no force whatsoever for the relief of Antwerp and dispatched the promised Territorial Division and Brigade of *Fusiliers Marins* only for the purpose of guaranteeing the Belgian line of retreat.

---

[129] CT #1594/G, War to General Staff, Romilly-sur-Seine, October 7, [1914], 9:20 a.m., *AFGG*, I(IV) A(III), no. 2312; CT #1386, Commander-in-Chief to Foch at Doullens, October 7, 1914, 9:50 a.m., *AFGG*, I(IV) A(III), no. 2322; Berthelot, *Diary*, I, entry of October 7, 1914, p. 181; CT #1413, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, October 7, 1914, 11:35 a.m., *AFGG*, I(IV) A(III), no. 2325 and ns. 1-2, p. 161.

[130] CT #1596/G, War to General Staff, Romilly, October 7, [1914], 2:15 p.m., *AFGG*, I(IV) A(III), no. 2313; CT #1481, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, October 7, 1914, 7:20 p.m., *AFGG*, I(IV) A(III), no. 2331; Berthelot, *Diary*, I, entry of October 7, 1914, p. 181. See CT #1604/G, [War to] General Staff, Romilly, October 7, 1914, *AFGG*, I(IV) A(III), no. 2314.

[131] CT #169, Pau (at Ghent) to General-in-Chief, *GQG*, October 8, [1914], 2:16 p.m., *AFGG*, I(IV) A(III), no. 2412; CT #172, Pau (at Ostend) to Commander-in-Chief, October 9, [1914], 12:35 a.m., *AFGG*, I(IV) A(III), no. 2482; Tel. message, Foch to *GQG*, October 9, [1914], *AFGG*, I(IV) A(III), no. 2489; T #179, French Military Attaché (Ostend) to Minister of War, October 10, [1914], 11:30 a.m., *AFGG*, I(IV) A(III), no. 2550 and n. 1, p. 332.



MAP 11
ANTWERP OPERATIONS
19th Sept. - 15th Oct. 1914.

NORTH SEA
HOLLAND
BELGIUM
ANTWERP
GHENT
BRUSSELS
LOUVAIN
MECHLIN
GERMAN ATTACK
SCHELDE
Zeebrugge
OSTEND
BRUGES
Nieuport
YSER
Dixmude
DUNKIRK
BELGIAN ARMY 15 Oct.
ROULERS
Thielt
Aeltre
7th DIVISION
COURTRAI
LYS
Ypres
Poperinghe
ARMENTIERES
LILLE
CAVALRY CORPS
IV (GER.) CAV. CORPS
CONNEAU'S CAV. CORPS
III. CORPS
II. CORPS
B.E.F. arriving from the Aisne 10 Oct.
Bethune
La Bassée
9 Oct.
10 Oct.
Canal
MONS
Alost
Dendre
SCALE
N

Adapted from HGW (1914), II, between pp. 26-27.

In response to Kitchener's request on October 7 for a second French territorial division for the relief of Antwerp, Joffre had a territorial division at Cherbourg moved to Dunkirk, between October 10 and 11, but it was too late to be of service to the Belgians and was deployed to cover British debarkation on the northern flank.[132]

The failure of the French to follow through on their original plan brought forth bitter recriminations from Kitchener, who complained to the French Government on October 8 about the French change of plan without prior consultation. The French territorial division had been sent to Poperinghe instead of Ostend without prior agreement, he complained, and Rawlinson, concentrated at Bruges as promised, had not been able to locate the French Fusiliers Marins (stopped by Pau at Ghent), let alone determine their mission.[133] "If the movements anticipated for our territorial division were not executed," replied Millerand four days later, defending Joffre's actions, "it is uniquely due to circumstance over which we have no control." Some were prevented from arriving at Poperinghe by German cavalry, he said, discussing the later action of the division, and some had to go to St. Omer to protect the debarkation of British troops.[134] No explanation was ever given for the initial change of plan about which Kitchener had inquired. There was, of course, none except that Joffre, intent on the flanking manoeuvre in Flanders, had failed to execute the promises of his Government.

---

[132] CT #1604/G, Minister of War to General Staff, Romilly, October 7, 1914, AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2314; CT #1570, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, October 8, [1914], 9:02 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2402.

[133] CT #1611/G, War to General Staff, Romilly-sur-Seine, October 9, [1914], 2:00 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2472 and ns., p. 272.

[134] CT #361, [Delcassé to Cambon], 12 October, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/16; cf. "Projet de Réponse," October 11, 1914, Millerand Papers, BN, Ctn. 26, "Opérations B," "Relations au GB-1."

On October 7, when the danger of Antwerp falling became imminent, Kitchener had also begun to realize that the relieving force was not adequate to save the fortress, and attempted, as a last-ditch effort, to again involve the BEF concentrating in northern France in its defence.

> In the evening came a couple of wires from K. [wrote Wilson] which showed an amazing ignorance of rudimentary principles. He said Winston had come back from Antwerp & the place would fall, Rawley [Rawlinson] & 7th Div. not strong enough to save it or relieve it; suggested therefore that we go & relieve it. The d___ fool; how can he do this when we can't get to Lille & can't detrain at St. Omer yet?[135]

Wavering on his own strategy of direct relief for the fortress, Kitchener "added" that "if General Joffre considers that even the momentary absence of British troops from the main theatre of operations could not take place, without compromising the success of the campaign," he would be inclined to agree, in which case "it would appear preferable to send the 7th Division to join up with the Army of the Marshal rather than directing it to Antwerp."[136]

United in their strategy, the two commands were entirely agreed on the appropriate reply, having already concerted their efforts in an attempt to have the 7th Division land at Boulogne. "In the present situation at Antwerp, the reinforcement of the garrison by the 7th English division would have no impact on the fate of the place," Joffre told Sir John. He therefore backed Sir John's view that "the success of the main theatre of operations would be seriously compromised, if any part of the English forces were withdrawn." "The best and surest way to help Antwerp is to pursue with the greatest possible speed the plan presently in operation," the Field Commanders declared,[137] reiterating in chorus a slightly worn and irrelevant cliché, given the immediate danger to the fortress.

---

[135] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 7, 1914.

[136] Tel. message, Huguet to General Staff, Romilly-sur-Seine, October 7, 1914, 11:00 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2339.

Indeed, Rawlinson's mission had been changed from one of relieving the fortress to "extricating the Naval Division" (to be sent home via Ostend) and assuring the safe retreat of the Belgian Army. Although his force had initially been dispatched on a temporary mission, the Cabinet decided on October 9 that it would then "join Sir John's Command" on a permanent basis.[138] The Field Commanders' united request for all available forces in the main theatre thus appears to have made an impression on the Cabinet which, because of the fear of invasion, had not been willing initially to allow the 7th Division to depart "for more than a rapid movement on Antwerp."[139]

On the question of Rawlinson's independent command, Sir John found a ready ally not only in the French Government, who took up the matter with Kitchener on October 5 and again on October 8, but in Joffre, who, in response to Kitchener's telegram complaining of Rawlinson's lack of information on the Fusiliers Marins Brigade,[140] took up Sir John's cause as a means of submitting all British forces to his direction. "To coordinate operations in the north," he wrote on October 9 in a message for Kitchener, "it is essential" "that all English troops be put under the sole command of Marshal French" who "acts in harmony" with General Foch and who has command of all French troops in the region.[141]

---

[137] Ibid.; Tel. message #1575, Commander-in-Chief to Huguet, October 8, 1914, 8:45 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2401; CT #1601, Commander-in-Chief to War Minister, October 8, 1914, 10:05 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2404; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of October 8, 1914, pp. 182-83.

[138] Letter, Asquith to the King, October 7, 1914, PRO, Cab 41/35/51, R/188; AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 2396; Letter, Kitchener to French, 10-10-14, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/30.

[139] Cassar, Kitchener, p. 245.

[140] CT #1611/G, War to General Staff, Romilly, October 9, [1914], at 2:00 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2472; CT #1616/G, War to General Staff, Romilly, October 9, 1914, 3:15 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2473 and n. 2, p. 273.

The next day Joffre made an even more pressing demand for unity in the British Command as a result of a new difficulty between Pau and Rawlinson. Anxious to have the Belgian and British forces leaving Antwerp join up with the Anglo-French left concentrating in Flanders and to act aggressively on the outer German flank, Joffre requested on October 8 that the Belgian Army retreat not to Ostend and Bruges but behind the Scheldt River to the Deynse-Thielt-Courtrai regions,[142] and that Rawlinson at Bruges march against the communication lines of German cavalry in the Ypres-Menin region in order to secure the Belgian line of retreat.[143] The exhausted Belgian Army, unwilling to engage immediately in a new offensive action, retreated behind the Lys to the Thourout-Dixmude-Ostend region. Although Pau managed to arrange with Rawlinson for a sortie of mixed Anglo-Belgian cavalry from Roulers as Joffre had requested, the sortie was not executed to Pau's satisfaction, for Rawlinson, on Kitchener's advice, kept part of his cavalry division at Ostend to cover debarkations.[144]

---

[141] CT #1880, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, October 9, 1914, 2:00 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2477.

[142] #1169, [GQG] Note for the Armies, October 6, 1914, AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2115; CT #1642, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, October 8, 1914, 1:45 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2408.

[143] CT #1698, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, October 8, 1914, 5:59 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2410.

Pau's complaint of British Government interference in his operations was immediately taken up by Joffre with Kitchener in very blunt language. "General Pau informs me that his dispositions taken in accord with General Rawlinson and on my advice were only partially executed," he wrote on October 10, "because of contrary advice given by Lord Kitchener." "It is indispensable that . . . General Rawlinson receive orders from only Marshal French who functions in constant agreement with myself," he continued. "The concerted action of Allied troops in the north of France and in Belgium cannot be assured otherwise."[145] To Joffre, who was by now very irate with the British Government, it appeared that Kitchener had grossly interfered in his operations and his plan of retreat for the Belgian Army.

The incident, really a small one but exaggerated out of all proportion because of the preceding conflict, took on considerable significance. "I cannot imagine what "B" Joffre has got in his bonnet," wrote Kitchener to Sir John on November 11, amazed at Joffre's vigourous complaints. "I never heard of the arrival of General Pau on the scene until after I had placed the troops under you," he continued. "It seems quite absurd," he observed, "to talk of the French General being interfered with in a matter relating purely to British troops," when, according to the telegrams in his possession, Joffre "through his Government agreed that the operations for the relief of Antwerp should be conducted under a British General."[146] This indeed was the case, Joffre having apparently taken no notice of a communication received from Pau via the French Government on October 8 which placed Rawlinson in charge of the operations at Bruges.[147] Kitchener subordinated Rawlinson to Sir John on October 9, but his ire at what he considered unwarranted interference of the French Command in matters of British policy reached a crescendo. The British Government "must maintain their rights," he affirmed in a letter to Sir John, "to determine the general policy" under which British forces "are employed and under whose orders they shall act." The French must understand, he warned, evoking for the first time the ultimate British weapon, that "His Majesty's Government must retain the right (which I hope they will never have to exercise) to withdraw troops from France whenever they consider such a course imperative."[148] Conflict over the defence of Antwerp had thus become by far the most serious difference to date between Kitchener and Joffre.

---

[144] CT #181, Pau (at Ostend) to Commander-in-Chief, October 10, [1914], 6:00 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2552; see CT #172, 173, Pau (at Ostend) to General-in-Chief, October 9, [1914], 12:35, 2:07 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), nos. 2482, 2483; T. Pau to General-in-Chief, 10 October, 1914, 11:26 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2551; Letter, Kitchener to French, 11-10-14, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/32; CT #2141, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, October 10, 1914, 6:00 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2545.

[145] CT #2141, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, October 10, 1914, 6:00 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2545.

The failure of the expedition had important political implications. In Great Britain, wrote a recent commentator, "Antwerp was widely regarded as an unmitigated disaster, a kind of twentieth century Walcheren Expedition (1809)."[149] In the press, criticism focused largely on Churchill, who was blamed for the "Antwerp blunder" and the dispatch (despite his orders to the contrary) of the raw naval recruits of the Royal Naval Division, many of whom had never fired a rifle before. Responsibility for the loss of two Marine batallions (1,560 men), who were interned in Holland after their line of escape was cut off on October 9, was further heaped on his shoulders. His position before the country and the Cabinet was thus seriously undermined.[150]

---

[146] Letter, Kitchener to French, 11-10-14, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/32.

[147] This report, signed by Pau, Rumilly and Cambon, reached the French War Ministry via the War Office on October 7. "In this city [Bruges]," it said, "the English General Rawlinson is installed with his Staff to take command of the Anglo-French troops which debark at Dunkirk, Ostend and Zeebruge; he is attempting to join hands with the Belgian Army and to facilitate its retreat." (CT #1605/G, War to Staff, Romilly-sur-Seine, October 8, [1914], 12:55 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2396.)

[148] Letter, Kitchener to French, 11-10-14, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/32.

Kitchener, on the other hand, who had initiated the expedition, was little criticized in the press for his role and managed to escape largely unharmed in political circles by blaming the French for failure of the expedition. The failure of French cooperation, Asquith complained to the King on October 9, "made it impossible to dispatch Gen. Rawlinson's divisions as a relieving force."[151]

The failure of the expedition thus left the Cabinet rather embittered toward the French.[152] "The non-appearance of the French division after agreeing most formally to come & cooperate upset anything that could be done," wrote Kitchener to Sir John,[153] setting forth his entire case. By "orders changing the directions of the Territorial Division, which was promised to concentrate at Ostend to help in the relief of Antwerp," Kitchener complained specifically, Joffre "failed to carry out an engagement made by his Government after reference to him and became therefore to a considerable extent responsible for the fall of Antwerp and moreover placed 8000 British Marines and Bluejackets who were in Antwerp in considerable peril."[154] Joffre's footdragging in the operation had indeed been a considerable inconvenience. But it is highly doubtful that early arrival of one territorial division would have substantially altered the outcome of the siege. The relieving expedition came too little and too late to be any real help. Kitchener's real need was to find a political scapegoat for the failure of the expedition.

---

[149] Trainor, "Antwerp 1914," p. 17; cf. Longford, Wellington, I, 189, 205-06, 216.

[150] Gilbert, Churchill, III, 124-34.

[151] Letter, Asquith to the King, October 9, 1914, PRO, Cab 41/35/51, R/188; see Cassar, Kitchener, p. 248; Gilbert, Churchill, III, 125ff.

[152] See Letter, Asquith to the King, October 9, 1914, PRO, Cab 41/35/51, R/188; Letter, Asquith to Venetia Stanley, 8 October, 1914, in Gilbert, Churchill, III, Companion, I, 179-80.

[153] Letter, Kitchener to French, 10-10-14, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/30.

The British Command in France provided little consolation to Kitchener, who sent a copy of the correspondence between himself and the French Government to Sir John for his comment. "It is clear," wrote Wilson,

> that K. has got himself into a loop about sending (& losing) marines at Antwerp & is now whining to Sir John to help him. I strongly advised Sir John on no account to all[ow] himself to be dragged in. K sent this exp[edition] to Antwerp ag[ains]t Joffre's strong protest & without Sir John's knowledge. Let the fool stew in his own juice.[155]

Sir John followed Wilson's advice to the letter. In polite language he informed Kitchener that had he been consulted in advance, he might have "avoided" or at least "warned" of "some of the pitfalls which the French (unwittingly) put in the path of people who are not accustomed to deal day by day with them." "They are always late with reinforcements or support," he observed, "and territorials are not to be trusted."[156] Piqued by Kitchener's independent action, Sir John thus had the last word on his disconcerted would-be master.

---

[154] Letter, Kitchener to French, 11-10-14, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/30.

[155] Ibid.; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 12, 1914.

Rawlinson's subordination to Sir John finally resolved the conflict. As Sir John and Joffre were in essential agreement on strategic matters, and the fallen fortress no longer a matter of direct concern, harmony was restored. Resisting the Belgian desire to seek refuge at Le Havre by retreating through Dunkirk and Calais, the French Command insisted that the dispirited Belgian Army cling to the last fragment of Belgian territory and contribute to the defence of the country.[157] A plan for the juncture of all forces in the north, Belgian, British and French, and an attack on Lille, drawn up by Foch on October 10 and approved by both Joffre and Sir John, brought the question of Anglo-French conflict of strategy over the defence of Antwerp to an immediate close.[158] The later British hope of clearing the Channel of German submarine bases, redeeming Antwerp and rolling up the enemy flank by a breakthrough in

---

[156] Letter, French to Kitchener, 13th October, 1914, Kitchener Papers, *PRO*, 30 57/49 WA/33.

[157] CT #1630/G, War to Staff, Romilly, October 11, 1914, 9:45 a.m., *AFGG*, I(IV) A(III), no. 2611; CT #2305, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, October 11, 1914, 7:00 p.m., *AFGG*, I(IV) A(III), no. 2622; CT, Pau to General-in-Chief, October 11, 1914, 9:30 a.m., *AFGG*, I(IV) A(III), no. 2630; CT #2221, Commander-in-Chief to General Pau, Dunkirk, October 11, 1914, 9:10 a.m., *AFGG*, I(IV) A(III), no. 2617; CT #2371, CT #2188, Commander-in-Chief to Foch, 11 October, [1914], 3:00 a.m., 7:20 p.m., *AFGG*, I(IV) A(III), nos. 2615, 2614; CT Pau (at Calais) to *GQG*, October 12, [1914], 11:40 a.m., *AFGG*, I(IV) A(III), no. 2695; Berthelot, *Diary*, I, entry of October 11, 1914, pp. 187-88.

[158] "Note of October 10," [1914], Foch [to Marshal French], *AFF*, Foch, *Journees*, clipped to p. 13 (reproduced in *AFGG*, I(IV) A(III), no. 2567); Letter, Foch to Joffre, 10-10-14, *AG*, "Correspondance Foch (October 10, 1914 - January 21, 1916)," #1; French to Foch, October 11, 1914, 11:00 p.m., *AFGG*, I(IV) A(III), no. 2631; CT, General-in-Chief to Foch, October 11, [1914], 10:05, *AFGG*, I(IV) A(III), no. 2628.

Flanders would nonetheless persist as an element of British strategic thought for a long time to come and finally result in Haig's futile Passchandaele offensive in the summer of 1917.[159]

Conclusions

The conflict between British strategic policy and French field strategy over the defence of the Channel ports and Antwerp in 1914 was not a mere incident in Anglo-French military relations but the expression of long-term differences in the defence strategies of the two countries. As a seapower in close proximity to the continent, Great Britain's most fundamental strategic interest since before the time of Elizabeth, next to defence of the Island itself, had been to prevent a strong power from acquiring control of the Channel ports, the gateway to British commerce with the continent and which, if held by a strong enemy, threatened the safety of the Island itself.[160] At times British forces, in the long course of British history, were committed to the defence of the continent; they were often engaged with the idea of maintaining a suitable balance of power on the continent in order to preserve vital British interests on the Channel coasts.

In August, 1914, the anomalous situation of the BEF being sent to fight alongside the French Army in order to defend vital British interests on the Channel coast had arisen because the plan for the concentration of the BEF in conjunction with the French Army was the only plan in existence. The "interventionists" thus scored a major victory over the "blue water" school; but the debate was reopened in favour of the "blue water" school at the end of August when French strategy failed to provide an effective defence for the vital ports. The British Government then began to consider means of protecting their vital interests on the seaports directly with British forces. The British Government's pressure after September 11 to have the BEF concentrate on the Allied left flank and then the demand for an expedition for the relief of Antwerp were both aspects of that common goal.

---

[159] See Guinn, British Strategy and Politics, pp. 243-46; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entries of December 6-8, 10, 1914; CT, Guerre to Joffre, December 9, 1914, AFGG, II, A(I), no. 291.

[160] See, for example, Garrett Mattingly, The Armada (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1959).

The French, like the Germans, basing their existence on the maintenance of power on land, tended to believe that victory in the main theatre would allow for the proper resolution of all difficulties at the conference table. Insensitive to the needs of their maritime Ally, the French High Command saw Antwerp as little more than an outdated fortress and hoped not only to drive the Germans out of Belgium but free the French industrial region of the north by a new offensive on the Allied flank. French strategy therefore was opposed to an expedition for the relief of Antwerp and called for immediate evacuation of the area by the Belgian Army in order to assure its safety and its association with the Allied left wing in the manoeuvre against the German flank. The conflict of strategies for the defence of Antwerp thus symbolized two national approaches to strategy. It also foreshadowed the debate between "westerners" and "easterners" in Great Britain who, after the prospect of immediate victory in the field waned with the advent of trench warfare in mid-November, took up the arguments of the prewar "interventionists" and "blue water" schools respectively for the rest of the war.[161]

Militarily, it was fortuitous for the Allies that the two strategies for the defence of Antwerp were in conflict. Entirely Clausewitzian in orientation, French strategy, which focused totally on manoeuvre and battle, failed to appreciate the value of strategic locations. Without the corrective of the British-sponsored expedition for the relief of Antwerp, although "too little, too late" to save that port, much more of the Channel coast would undoubtedly have fallen into enemy hands.

---

[161] See Blake, "Great Britain," pp. 31-48.

The British Army in France, however, tended to side with the French Command in its orientation toward an emphasis on battle and victory in the field. As observed, Sir John resented any diversion which would draw forces from his operation, and was unprepared to countenance an action not under his command. He thus sided with Joffre, who based everything on his faith in decisive victory in the main theatre. Indeed, once engaged in the conflict, British Field Commanders (Sir John French and later Sir Douglas Haig, who followed him) tended to ignore the wider interests of Empire and to adopt a narrowly military strategy which reflected their desire to win battles and their avidity for command of all available forces. Their great cry throughout the rest of the war, in harmony with the French Command, was thus for unlimited support on the western front in opposition to any diversion on secondary theatres. The western-front strategy of the military commanders, however, would frequently clash with the strategic policy of the British Government and the French Cabinet.[162] A basic ongoing feature of the coalition would therefore be acute civil-military conflict.

While learning to work together for a common purpose, Joffre and Sir John nevertheless had not learned to resolve the differences between them. The relationship therefore continued to be taut at times. Thus, while the two Commands gave the appearance of solidarity on the question of Belgian strategy and the issue of a divided British Command in France, much conflict still persisted on the question of the concentration and engagement of the BEF. Sir John, for the sake of Allied solidarity, nonetheless attempted to hide his difficulties with the French from Kitchener. "We are, and really always have been on the best of terms," he told Kitchener on October 13, 1914.[163] Joffre, on the other hand, while preserving the facade of military solidarity, tended to seek redress for his grievances against Sir John through political action. An important element of hypocrisy and deception thus prevailed in their relationship in the absence of trust and open communications.

---

[162] Cf. Ibid.

---

[163] Letter, French to Kitchener, 13th October, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/33.

CHAPTER X

THE MARCH ON LILLE AND THE REQUEST FOR SIR JOHN'S RECALL, OCTOBER 5-23, 1914

The Advent of Foch

From October 5 until October 19, when the gathering of the BEF in northern France was complete, the question of concentration and redeployment of the BEF on the German flank occupied the centre stage of inter-command relations. The period was marked by the appointment of Ferdinand Foch as assistant to the Commander-in-Chief on October 4, with the mission of coordinating operations on the Allied left wing north of the Oise,[1] and ended with the failure of the British march on Lille, with all its attendant consequences.

Foch's appointment had political overtones. Unhappy with Gallieni for having advanced prematurely on the Ourcq and jealous of his having claimed for himself the victory of the Marne,[2] Joffre had asked the French Government as early as September 24 to withdraw Gallieni's "letter of service" as his designated successor and to confer it upon Foch. Foch, Joffre said, had shown "uncontestable superiority from the point of view of character and military conception." He would serve as Joffre's ad latus to aid him in discharging the ever-mounting burdens of his Command.[3]

---

[1] Foch, Journées, AFF, entry of October 4, [1914], p. 3; CT #821, Commander-in-Chief to General Commanding Second Army, Breteuil, . . ., October 4, 1914, 7:20 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 2008; #993, "Note for the Commander-in-Chief of British Forces," October 6, 1914, AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2224.

[2] Poincaré Papers, XXXVII, BN, NAF (16028), "Notes Journalières," September - December, 1914, entry of October 9, 1914 (recounting events of October 6), p. 125.

The French Cabinet was reluctant to move, however, for Gallieni had considerable support among the parliamentary left. The Government therefore accepted Joffre's proposition in principle but withheld the official nomination of Foch as successor-designate to Joffre.[4] Feeling the need for an "active and energetic" chief to keep Castelnau from retreating[5] and to coordinate the activities of the French, British and Belgian Armies in the north,[6] Joffre then had Foch appointed "adjoint" or assistant to the Commander-in-Chief, but with powers essentially those of an Army Group Commander, a title he assumed very belatedly on June 13, 1915.[7] Much impressed with Foch after their visit to the front on November 1-2, Poincaré and Millerand privately agreed to his designation as eventual successor to Joffre, but no official "letter of service" was ever given.[8]

---

[3] CT 11289, Commander-in-Chief to Minister, Personal, September 24, 1914, 10:30 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 1076; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 320-21.

[4] CT #1481/G, Millerand [to Joffre], 24 September, [1914], 3:10 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 1199; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 321; Poincaré Papers, XXXVII, BN, NAF (16028), "Notes Journalières," September - December 1914, entry of October 9, 1914 (recounting events of October 5), p. 125.

[5] CT 12743, Commander-in-Chief to Minister, Personal, September 26, 1914, 7:40 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 1316.

[6] Herbillon, Souvenirs, I, entry of October 8, 1914, p. 52; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of October 4, 1914, p. 173; "Battle of Flanders," (Notes intended for the Ambassadors and Ministers of France), November 19, 1914, AE, Série "Guerre 1914-1918," "Opérations Stratégiques," #979, p. 6; see AFGG, X(I), pp. 14-15.

[7] CT #821, Commander-in-Chief to General Commanding [Second] Army, Breteuil, October 4, 1914, 7:20 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 2008; AFGG, X(I), pp. 14-15.

Foch was an excellent choice for the coordination of operations in the north. Prior to the war he had had a close association with Wilson and was well acquainted and on good terms with both Sir John and his eventual successor, Sir Douglas Haig. Of all the French generals, Foch had the finest appreciation of the nature and character of the British Army and the greatest confidence in British loyalty and support.[9] Vigourous in gesture, brusque in speech, he possessed an invincible will to "fight and win" and the capacity to inspire the greatest confidence and evoke the utmost energy from his associates and subordinates. "This man would make the dead fight," reported the King of the Belgians.[10] Foch's own reflections on his experience in northern France from 1914 to 1916 and his later position as Allied Commander-in-Chief convey the essential truth. Whatever their formal command arrangement, he wrote, Allies must be persuaded by one having their confidence, and not commanded.[11] Foch was able to inspire that confidence.

Although Catholic and conservative, in contrast to the freemasonry and republicanism of his Chief, Foch was in complete accord with Joffre in his belief in vigourous offensive action. But as a student of military history and strategy, he was much more sensitive to the changing nature of warfare than his superior when the lines of trenches hardened on the western front at the end of 1914. On the other hand, he was less cunning and less astute politically than Joffre.[12]

---

[8] Letter, Joffre to Foch, 3 November, 1914, AFF, file "Joffre."

[9] Cf. Weygand, Mémoires, I, 142-45, 184-85.

[10] Ibid., pp. 184-85; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 95.

[11] Foch, Mémoires, I, 255-56.

The confidence Foch exuded and inspired to such a high degree was entirely necessary, for no formal arrangement had been drawn up with the Belgian or British Armies for the coordination of the operations in the north. His authority with Sir John depended solely on Joffre's request of October 5 that the British coordinate their operations in the north through him.[13] As all of the day-to-day coordination and much of the military planning were thereafter conducted by Joffre through him, Foch's accession to power profoundly altered Allied command relations. His dynamism and penchant for the offensive immediately pushed the British into greater aggressiveness. Continually irritated with the French Command on questions related to the transfer and redeployment of the BEF, however, Sir John was most reluctant at first to accept the leadership of this new underling of Joffre. Within the British Command, moreover, Foch's close relationship with Wilson exacerbated the power struggle between Wilson and Murray.

The rather painful process of adjusting to a new command structure began as the concentration zone in the north for the British II Corps, the first to leave the Aisne, became a matter of serious concern on October 5-6, and Foch was called in to resolve the problem. As agreed on October 4, the British II Corps was to assemble in the St. Omer - Hazebrouck area.[14] But at 11:30 p.m. the next evening, "because of the incursion of enemy cavalry toward Hazebrouck," Joffre proposed "debarkation" of the II Corps in the Calais-Gravelines region.[15] Wilson, however, who had been keeping vigil for Sir John at British Headquarters that night, rejected the Calais-Gravelines area which, he complained, would expose the arriving Corps "to being completely separated from the French line" and asked instead for the Doullens-Arras-Saint Pol triangle further south.[16] The more southerly zone would place the British Corps behind the new French Tenth Army, which, formed under General de Maud'huy on September 29 (as an army detachment) had its main body about Arras.[17] If the Amiens-St. Pol line were not available, Wilson said, British troops should then be detrained at Amiens, still further south.[18]

---

[12] Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 95; Weygand, Mémoires, I, 180-83. See below, Chapter XII.

[13] CT #1105, Commander-in-Chief to Foch, Breteuil, October 5, 1914, 9:45 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 2122; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of October 5, 1914, p. 175.

[14] #791, Note of the Commander-in-Chief to Marshal French, relative to the transport of British Forces, October 4, 1914, 4:00 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(II), no. 2002 and n. 1, p. 669; Note of Sir John French to

Wilson's rejection of the French plan upset the French Command,[19]

Commander-in-Chief, French Armies, October 5, 1914, AFGG, I(IV) A(IV), no. 2129; CT #914, Commander-in-Chief to French Mission, Fère-en-Tardenois, October 5, 1914, 9:05 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2113.

[15] "Relations between French and British Commands (Résumé)," [March 1915], AG, 16N1905, GQG, EM, 3rd Bur., Dos. 1, Armée Anglaise, #34; CT #1102, Commander-in-Chief to Commander, English Troops, October 5, 1914, 11:30 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2121; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 6, 1914; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of October 6, 1914, p. 175.

[16] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 6, 1914; "Relations between French and British Commands (Résumé)," [March 1915], AG, 16N1905, GQG, EM, 3rd Bur., Dos. 1, Armee Anglaise, #34; Confirmation of Tel. message of French Mission to Director of Railways at GQG, October 5, 1914, 11:30 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2130.

[17] See Weygand, Mémoires, I, 131-32; Foch, Mémoires, I, Map 1, "Situation le 5 Oct. 1914," following p. 274; Maud'huy's army detachment became the Tenth Army on October 5, 1914. (Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of October 5, 1914, p. 174.) See Map 12, p. 399.

[18] "Relations between French and British Commands (Résumé)," [March 1915], AG, 16N1905, GQG, EM, 3rd Bur., Dos. 1, Armée Anglaise, #34; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 6, 1914.

[19] Clive Diaries, II/I, KCMA, entry of October 6, 1914. "He would

who "said yes, at first" to Wilson's counterproposal and then, at 2:40 a.m., wired that the Doullens-St. Pol region was not available and, further, that in view of the urgency of the situation, orders had already been given for the debarkation of the British Corps between Etaples and Abbeville on the line to Calais.[20] These orders, moreover, Joffre maintained the next day despite British protests that Amiens-Abbeville be kept as the debarkation zone and their demand that "in any case [British troops] not detrain further north than Abbeville." Debarkations having already begun, Joffre argued, "any modifications made at this time would cause perturbation in the railway service." As French cavalry protected the zone, he said, there was "no risk in debarking between Abbeville and Etaples."[21] And inasmuch as the French controlled the railways, the British had little recourse but to protest.

Joffre, however, accepted the British proposal for the St. Pol-Doullens-Arras triangle as the final zone of concentration on October 6. British troops, he urged, should march from the Abbeville-Etaples line to St. Pol (about 30 kilometres) as rapidly as possible in order to "extend and accentuate" the action of the French Tenth Army and to "establish liaison with English and Belgian forces operating in Belgium." To work out the details of British concentration, he asked that Wilson be

---

keep his face close to mine, which made the interview more unpleasant," Clive wrote of his interview with Berthelot. (Ibid.)

[20] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 6, 1914; "Relations between French and British Commands (Résumé)," [March 1915], AG, 16N1905, GQG, EM, 3rd Bur., Dos. 1, Armée Anglaise, #34; see Memorandum on French and German Forces, October 4, [1914], AFGG, I(IV) A(III).

[21] "Relations between French and British Commands (Résumé)," [March 1915], AG, 16N1905, GQG, EM, 3rd Bur., Dos. 1, Armée Anglaise, #34; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 6, 1914; CT #1203, Commander-in-Chief to Head of French Mission, Fère-en-Tardenois, 1:30 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III).

sent from British Headquarters at Fère-en-Tardenois to Doullens to confer with Foch.[22]

A further barb was added. To satisfy the ever-suspicious Berthelot, who feared that the British might misunderstand and interpret the request to coordinate with Foch as tacit French acceptance of total concentration before marching, the alleged British agreement to engage by successive divisions (not corps) was once again reiterated.[23] "I am striving to speed up the action of the British Army against two enemy (cavalry) divisions about Lille," Joffre confided to his Government, "which are threatening to envelop the French left and cut it off from the Belgian Army."[24]

Sir John was most irritated by the whole proceeding. "Joffre will not tell [me] his plans," he complained to Clive[25] in protest against French transporting a British corps several kilometres to the north of the zone requested, despite British demands to the contrary. And the request that Wilson be sent to work out an arrangement with Foch (coupled with Joffre's use of the diplomatic channel to oblige successive engagement of divisions in the north) "infuriated" Sir John and led to the violent outburst against GQG earlier described.[26] Sir John, in fact, seriously resented the imposition of a new intermediary between himself and Joffre, which would further degrade his position vis-à-vis the French Command.[27]

---

[22] CT #1161, Commander-in-Chief to Head, French Mission, Fère-en-Tardenois, October 6, 1914, 11:10 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2211; #1169, "Note for the Armies," October 6, 1914 (about 10:00 p.m.), AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2115 and n. 1, p. 7; CT 1140, Commander-in-Chief to Foch, Doullens, October 6, 1914, AG, 16N1975, "Ordres et instructions relatifs aux opérations," #15, doc. #1382 (reproduced in AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2208; see n. 3, p. 77.) Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of October 6, 1914, p. 177.

[23] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of October 6, 1914, pp. 177-79; "Note for the Commander-in-Chief of British Forces," October 6, 1914, AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2225.

[24] CT #1149, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, October 6, [1914], 9:30 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2209.

[25] Clive Diaries, II/I, KCMA, entry of October 6, 1914; cf. "Relations between French and British Commands (Résumé)," [March 1915], AG, 16N1905, GQG, EM, 3rd Bur., Dos. 1, Armée Anglaise, #34.

The British II Corps nonetheless detrained about Abbeville according to French plan. A further French proposal on October 7 to land the second division of the Corps in the original Hazebrouck-St. Omer zone, now deemed safe by the retreat of German cavalry, was rejected by Sir John, who wished to keep the Corps together.[28] The concentration zone for the Corps finally arranged by Foch and Wilson was located about twelve miles northeast of the Abbeville railhead, not far from the ancient battlefield of Crécy, from whence a portion of the Corps was transported to the front in French motorbuses. On October 11, the British II Corps, assisted by two British cavalry divisions arriving overland, thus marched into line in the Béthune-Aire region on the left of the French Tenth Army.[29] During their trek northward the two cavalry divisions had, with Sir John's approval, lent temporary assistance to Castelnau's Second Army on the afternoon of October 7, demonstrating that, despite continued friction and conflicts between commands, the spirit of

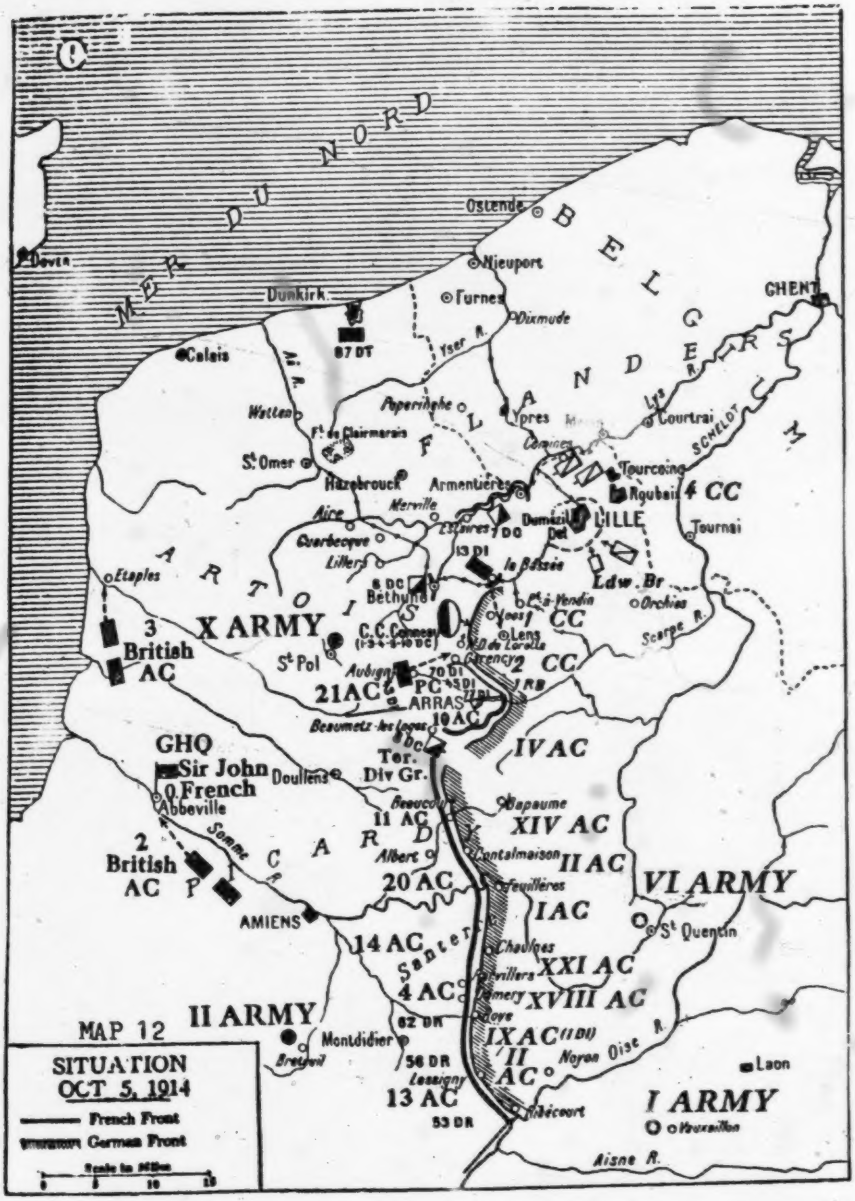
---

[26] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 6, 1914; Clive Diaries, II/I, KCMA, entry of October 6, 1914.

[27] Cf. Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 16, 1914; Weygand, Mémoires, I, 143.

[28] #1395, "Note relative to the Transport of British Forces into the Northern region," October 7, 1914, 9:45 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), p. 158, n. 1; CT, Huguet to Staff, Romilly-sur-Seine, [October 7, 1914, 11:30 a.m.], AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2337, p. 168, n. 2.

[29] T. SC/28, Foch to Staff, Romilly, October 8, 1914, 10:30 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2420; Weygand, Mémoires, I, 146; HGW (1914), II, 70-71. See Map 12, p. 399.



MAP 12

SITUATION
OCT 5, 1914

French Front
German Front
Scale in Miles
0 5 10 15
MER DU NORD
BELGIUM
FLANDERS
ARTOIS
PICARDY
Dover
Ostende
Nieuport
Furnes
Dixmude
Dunkirk
87 DT
Calais
Yser R.
GHENT
Courtrai
Lys R.
SCHELDT
Poperinghe
Ypres
Comines
Watten
St. Omer
Hazebrouck
Armentières
Tourcoing
Roubaix
4 CC
LILLE
Tournai
Merville
Aire
Guarbecque
Lillers
13 DI
La Bassée
Ldw. Br
Orchies
Etaples
8 DC
Bethune
Lens
Vimy
CC
Scarpe R.
3
British
AC
X ARMY
C.C. Conneau
St. Pol
Aubigny
2 CC
21 AC
PC
ARRAS
10 AC
Beaumetz-les-Loges
IV AC
GHQ
Sir John
French
Abbeville
Doullens
Ter.
Div Gr.
Bapaume
XIV AC
11 AC
Albert
Contalmaison
II AC
2
British
AC
Somme R.
20 AC
VI ARMY
AMIENS
I AC
St. Quentin
14 AC
Santerre
Chaulnes
XXI AC
4 AC
XVIII AC
Roye
62 DR
II ARMY
Montdidier
IX AC
Breteuil
56 DR
Lassigny
II
AC
Noyon
Oise R.
Laon
13 AC
53 DR
Ribécourt
I ARMY
Vauxaillon
Aisne R.

From Ferdinand Foch, The Memoirs of Marshal Foch, Tr. by Col. T. Bentley Mott (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1931), between pp. 114-15.

military solidarity in the field still prevailed.[30]

Foch's appointment was further punctuated by a renewed eruption between Wilson and Murray on October 6. Murray, clearly resentful of the considerable power given into Wilson's hands by his close association with the French, particularly disliked Joffre's request that Wilson be sent to coordinate with Foch on the details of British concentration. Murray, as could be expected, was not prepared to witness the erosion of his power without a struggle. Wilson recorded the results:

> Tonight Murray proceeded to denounce me to Huguet saying I considered myself a superior & as arbitrator & he would not tolerate it, etc., etc., -- that I was under his orders etc.; & altogether Huguet said, he showed a jealousy & a dislike which was remarkable. This is worth watching but the miserable fellow is afraid of me; he never forgets St. Quentin days nor shall I.[31]

The conflict continued at British Headquarters during the next week. Murray having fired the first salvo, Wilson took up the question with William Lambton, Sir John's personal secretary, the next day.

> I had a long talk with Billy Lambton this morning about Murray [Wilson wrote]. I told him of Murray's explosion to Huguet last night about me. Billy thinks Murray should be removed. He thinks he is a real danger where he is, & he says that Murray's jealousy & dislike of me increases every day. He said he would speak to Sir John about it. Billy was altogether in favour of my succeeding Murray, but as I told him, this was a thing I cared very little about, my chief concern being to keep this show going for Sir John as best I can.[32]

---

[30] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 6, 1914; CT #1316, Commander-in-Chief to Head of the French Mission, October 6, 1914, 11:15 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2222; Note remitted by Lieutenant-Colonel Brécard at British Mission, October 7, [1914], AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2336; Tel. message #1372, Commander-in-Chief to Foch and Castelnau, October 7, [1914], 7:00 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2818 and n. 1, p. 156. For Joffre's warm thanks, see CT #1382, Commander-in-Chief to Huguet, October 7, 1914, 8:55 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2319; HGW (1914), II, 68.

[31] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 6, 1914.

[32] Ibid., entry of October 7, 1914.

Lambton then talked the matter over with Sir John, who said he would speak to Wilson about it.[33] Sir John, however, delayed his chat with Wilson, and on October 10 a partial *modus vivendi* was worked out privately between Wilson and Murray, both of whom were by this time at loggerheads with Sir John. To his diary, Wilson revealed his mind and less than altruistic motives:

> This morning Archie [Murray] spoke to me about his position as C[hief] of S[taff]. He said it *was* becoming very difficult, Sir John getting more unreasonable. He asked me my opinion as to whether he should resign. He said if I told him of anyone who could do better he would go. I replied, that, for the moment I thought there ought to be no change; that I knew of no one who could take his place with greater *success*, & that I thought we ought to try & tide over the pressure & watch developments. This was agreed to. I could not tell him that I thought I could do better than he so I *had no* option. I was sorry for him. I told Billy of our talk; & he agreed it was the wisest thing.[34]

This partial reconciliation centred on the discontent of both with Sir John. Wilson, for his part, thought that Sir John was becoming "daily more difficult in his attitude to the French." But this did not stop Wilson from coveting Murray's position. "Archie said [if] he were to go I would succeed him. This made my advice still more difficult to give,"[35] wrote Wilson, who ironically found himself in the connundrum of having to provide career advice to the man he hoped to replace.

Although the matter was allowed to lapse temporarily until new conflict developed, Lambton was sent to London by Sir John to report the situation to Kitchener. "He will report personally to you and tell you more about things here than I can do in writing," wrote Sir John on October 13.[36] The circle of persons involved thus widened to include not only the French Command but the British Government. If Sir John was ineffective, there were some basic underlying reasons, beyond his own incompetence, not the least of which was the continual strife in his Command. That strife was bound to grow as Wilson began to exert a much greater influence because of his close association with Foch.

---

[33] *Ibid.*, entry of October 8, 1914.

[34] *Ibid.*, entry of October 10, 1914.

[35] *Ibid.*

Close personal contact between Foch and the British began on October 8, as the British Command moved from Fère-en-Tardenois to Abbeville to be near the main concentration of its troops. En route, Sir John, Murray, Wilson and their aides called on Foch at his Headquarters at Doullens. The meeting took the form of a reunion of old friends. "At 3:30 we reached Foch at Doullens," Wilson reported ecstatically. "Here a Guard of Honour & bugle, & Foch kissed me twice! in front of the whole crowd! Foch absolutely full of fight."[37]

Indeed he was! News that Antwerp had fallen (it actually fell the next day) merely served to have him hasten the manoeuvre to join up with the Belgian Army.[38] The concentration zone for the British III Corps, which Sir John had requested for St. Pol the day before, was moved further north to St. Omer under Foch's influence.[39] The French now deemed that region safe because of the retreat of German cavalry and the deployment of French territorials originally intended for Antwerp.[40] The two British cavalry divisions and the British III Corps, immediately upon arrival, it was agreed, would deploy between Béthune and St. Omer on October 12.[41] "I think we are going to hit the extreme right of the Germans & hit it hard," wrote Wilson optimistically the next day,[42] reflecting Foch's tonic effect on the British Command. By extending the British far to the north, however, Foch failed to provide adequate coverage for the line south of Ypres, which, held only by British cavalry, was to prove the source of grave concern at the end of October.

---

[36] Letter, French to Kitchener, October 13, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/33.

[37] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 8, 1914; see Foch, Mémoires, p. 177; Weygand, Mémoires, I, 142-45. Wilson mistakenly reported that Foch had "lost his son & one son-in-law."

[38] Foch, Mémoires, II, 177; Foch, Journées, AFF, 8 October, 1914, p. 6; cf. Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 9, 1914.

[39] Tel. message, [Colonel Huguet] to GQG , October 7, 1914, 7:40 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2338 and n. 1, p. 169; T. #600, Huguet (Abbeville) to Staff, Romilly-sur-Seine, October 8, 1914, 10:10 p.m.,

Foch's enthusiasm also overcame whatever reluctance Sir John may have harboured to engage each corps upon arrival.[43] Whether informed of a growing reluctance on Sir John's part or merely inspired by mistrust and lack of confidence, GQG was much concerned on October 8 about the "mission of the English Army" which Sir John "has too great a tendency to lose sight of."[44] A long memo was therefore sent to British Headquarters reaffirming the need for British troops to engage immediately upon arrival.[45] But Foch's report that the British II Corps and two

---

AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2413; cf. Cipher message, Huguet to Staff, Romilly-sur-Seine, October 7, 1914, 11:30 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2337 and n. 1, p. 168.

[40] See CT #1190, Commander-in-Chief to Foch, October 6, 1914, 1:00 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2213; CT 1386, Commander-in-Chief to General Foch, October 7, 1914, 9:50 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2322.

[41] T SC/28, Foch to Staff, Romilly, October 8, 1914, 10:30 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2420 and n. 1, p. 231.

[42] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 9, 1914.

[43] See Weygand, Mémoires, I, 142.

[44] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of October 8, 1914, p. 183; see CT 1853, Commander-in-Chief to Foch, October 9, 1914, 11:55 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 1853.

[45] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of October 8, 1914, pp. 208-

cavalry divisions were prepared to engage between Béthune and Lilliers immediately upon arrival[46] satisfied GQG. "General Foch is in the process of arranging to our satisfaction the deployment of English Forces," wrote Berthelot on October 9, and the next day Sir John confirmed his willingness to send the III Corps forward division-by-division as it arrived.[47]

British willingness to engage each corps upon arrival rested on renewed confidence, which was indeed very high as new forces swelled the strength of the BEF and old forces were regrouped. On October 9, the 1st and 2nd Cavalry Divisions, arriving from the Aisne, were grouped into a cavalry corps under Allenby, and the 7th Division and 3rd Cavalry Division, operating behind the Lys and finally placed under Sir John on October 9, were formed into the IV Corps under Rawlinson on October 10.[48] "As a result of recent fighting, officers and troops have taken great confidence and will not be afraid to fight even against superior numbers," Huguet reported to the Tenth Army on October 9.[49]

On the other hand, Sir John's direct relations with GQG, soured by Joffre's use of the diplomatic channel and Kitchener's intervention on October 6, remained very strained. "His attitude to the French" thus became "daily more difficult," as Joffre again pressed the British to en-

---

09. This document was not published in AFGG.

[46] CT #2962, Foch to Staff, Romilly-sur-Seine, October 9, [1914], 2:55 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2487.

[47] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of October 9, 1914, p. 185. Note, French to Joffre, 10 October 1914, AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 339.

[48] Huguet to Staff, [Xth Army], St. Pol, October 9, 1914, 10:45 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2484 and n. 1, p. 281; Huguet to Staff, Doullens, Romilly-sur-Seine, October 10, 1914, 11:15 p.m.

[49] Huguet to Staff, [Xth Army], St. Pol, October 9, 1914, 10:45 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2484 and n. 1, p. 281.

gage successive divisions.[50] As previously, Sir John at once countered by demanding the immediate transfer of the British I Corps to the north. On October 9 he approached Huguet twice on the subject, and, becoming "more and more pressing" in his demands, had a very stormy session with him on October 10. Transport of the I Corps had been promised for October 13, Sir John claimed. Its presence, he said, was "absolutely indispensable" in the north, and as it was forward in the line on the Aisne, daily wastage was rapidly reducing its offensive power. If it were not relieved at once, he threatened, he would be obliged to pull it back to the second entrenched position behind the Aisne.[51]

Huguet's attempt to convince Sir John that no firm date had been given (which the record would vindicate) for the relief of the Corps and that its attrition on the Aisne was moderate fell on deaf ears. "A most insulting wire to Joffre," written personally by Sir John expressing his disappointment at the delay and requesting an immediate timetable for the relief of the Corps, was not sent, however.[52] On British insistence, GQG decided on October 9 to relieve the Corps, and a telegram indicating GQG was studying the possibility of embarking the Corps at its billets arrived in time to calm Sir John's frazzled nerves.[53] Transportation of the first division would begin on October

---

[50] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 10, 1914.

[51] Letter, Huguet to Commander-in-Chief, October 10, 1914, AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2560.

[52] Ibid. Quotation is from Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 10, 1914. See CT #2142, Commander-in-Chief [to Vth Army], October 10, 1914, 5:45 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2544, in which Joffre accepts the 12th as the date for a local attack and agrees to relieve the I Corps only after. "The date of the 12th, which was given to you by the liaison officer of the English Army, does not correspond to any firm indication given by me to Marshal French," he wrote. (Ibid.)

[53] Berthelot, Diary, I, entries of October 9, 10, 1914, pp. 185-

13, said a later message, although no final date could yet be set for the transportation of the remaining division.[54]

Ultimately the two divisions of the I Corps were relieved successively beginning on October 12-13, and their transportation to the north was completed on October 19, six days later.[55] But the dispute had a very heavy legacy. The BEF having been relieved by only two French divisions and one brigade, the forward positions across the Aisne, previously held by the BEF, were lost on October 30, when the new forces were attacked.[56] The command crisis which developed, moreover, as Sir John, according to the French, "refused to fully engage" his III Corps in the march on Lille until the I Corps arrived on the front, was fraught with most serious consequences.[57]

With a new line of communication established with the French, however, Sir John could thus be on very good terms with Foch while being very unhappy with the French Command. That was further demonstrated in the elaboration of a new offensive plan. On the afternoon of October 10, the fighting general appeared at British Headquarters with a plan to

---

86; Letter, Huguet to Commander-in-Chief, October 10, 1914, AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2560; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 10, 1914.

[54] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of October 10, 1914, p. 287.

[55] #2269, Note, Joffre to VI Army, October 11, [1914], 9:40, AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2619; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of October 13, 1914, p. 190; CT #2891, Commander-in-Chief to Commander, VI Army, October 14, 1914, 9:15 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2811 and n. 1, p. 533; #3477, Commander-in-Chief to Foch, October 16, 1914, AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2914; cf. "La Bataille de Flandres," November 19, 1914, "Note intended for Ambassadors and Ministers of France," AE, Série "Guerre 1914-1918," "Opérations Stratégiques," #979, p. 7, which claims the I Corps did not begin to embark until October 15.

[56] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 459.

[57] "The Battle of Flanders," "Note intended for Ambassadors and Ministers of France," November 19, 1914, AE, Série "Guerre 1914-1918,"

effect the juncture of Belgian, British and French forces in preparation for an advance on Lille. To begin on the morning of October 13 (as the III Corps came into action), the British offensive would develop from the Cassel-Béthune line forward on the left past Lille to Courtrai against presumed light forces, while the French Tenth Corps on the British right pushed forward past Lille to Tournai on the Scheldt. Behind Courtrai and Tournai the dispersed forces from Antwerp could safely gather.[58]

This ambitious plan, which depended on a very energetic offensive by the British and the relative absence of enemy forces, was fully approved by Sir John.[59] "Foch simply said what he wanted done & when," according to Wilson.[60] "My relations with the English Army are marked by the greatest cordiality and the most perfect mutual confidence," Foch reported to Joffre on October 13. "I do everything to maintain this state of affairs," he continued. "Were that the only result of my presence in the north," he observed with remarkable insight, "I believe it appreciable."[61] According to Clive, even Murray was "enthusiastic about him."[62]

The appointment of Foch thus helped to defuse the tension be-

---

"Opérations Stratégiques," #979, p. 7.

[58] "Note of October 10," [given by Foch to Sir John], *AFF*, clipped opposite p. 13. (Reproduced in *AFGG*, I(IV) A(III), no. 2567.) Letter, Foch to Joffre, 10/10/1914, *AG*, "Correspondance Foch (10 October 1914 - 21 January 1916)," #1; Weygand, *Mémoires*, I, 147. See Map 13, p. 419.

[59] Message, French [to Foch], October 11, 1914, 11:00 a.m., *AFGG*, I(IV) A(III), no. 2631.

[60] Wilson Diaries, V, *IWM*, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 10, 1914.

[61] Letter, Foch to Joffre, October 13, 1914, *AG*, "Correspondance Foch (10 October 1914 - 21 January 1916)," #2.

[62] Clive Diaries, II/I, *KCMA*, entry of October 10, 1914.

tween Sir John and Joffre. As Maxime Weygand, Foch's Chief of Staff, observed, Sir John had had "serious quarrels with General Joffre, whose somewhat rough manner offended him."[63] Foch had the advantage of a good previous relationship with Sir John on which to build and the personal dynamism to spur the British on to the greater participation desired by Joffre. Foch being immediately on the spot, "direct personal communications between commanders" provided for much more effective liaison.[64] The establishment of a second line of communication moreover gave GQG greater control over the British: Whenever Sir John was at odds with Joffre, Foch could still carry out GQG policy; if Sir John and Foch should have a falling out, Joffre remained in the wings to arbitrate.

Sir John, however, as demonstrated, initially resisted the establishment of a new equal with whom he was to coordinate, for, as he fully appreciated, it degraded his position vis-à-vis Joffre. That attitude would persist until the events of the Battle of Ypres gave Foch a definite moral authority over him.[65] The energetic execution of Foch's plan for the march on Lille, which gained Joffre's full approval,[66] was thus a matter of some doubt. "The Marshal wants to go to Brussels at any cost," Foch reported on October 13. "I will help him the best I can," he pledged.[67] "We must push, push, push," Wilson observed the same day, "as we have nothing but cav[alry] in front of us." In his heart of hearts, he had his doubts, however. "Sir John talks loudly," he wrote, "but I am afraid he won't fight."[68] Foch's doubts were even greater. "Antwerp fell a few days too soon," he noted. "We may maintain a numerical superiority over the enemy," he observed, "but with the lack of vigour that our troops currently possess before the defensive capacity of the enemy, our numerical superiority and our lead may not be enough to produce an envelopment of serious consequences."[69] That was to prove a very perceptive observation.

---

[63] Weygand, Mémoires, I, 143.

[64] See Clive Diaries, II/I, KCMA, entry of October 10, 1914.

[65] See below, Chapter XI.

[66] CT #2180, General-in-Chief to Foch, October 11, 1914, 10:05 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2628.

[67] Letter, Foch to Joffre, October 13, 1914, AG, "Correspondance Foch (10 October 1914 - 21 January 1916)," #2.

The British demand for the transfer of the BEF had finally been resolved in British favour after much conflict between Joffre and Sir John. Half general, half diplomat, Wilson played a somewhat equivocal role as arbiter in the resolution of the conflict. By a combination of intrigue and legitimate persuasion, he had managed to convince both Sir John and the French of the need to transfer the BEF north. Beloved of the French, he continually adjusted differences between them and Sir John, usually taking the French line at British Headquarters, and presenting the British point of view at GQG and later to Foch. He thus performed a very valuable service in promoting understanding between commands. But his ambition, indiscretion and penchant for intrigue caused perpetual agitation and commotion to accompany his activities.

Naturally, the conflict had been somewhat attenuated by the common opposition of the two Commands to Kitchener's expedition for the relief of Antwerp and Joffre's support of Sir John on the question of

---

[68] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 13, 1914.

[69] Letter, Foch to Joffre, October 13, 1914, AG, "Correspondance Foch (10 October 1914 - 21 January 1916)," #2.

Rawlinson's independent command of the expedition. Sir John was particularly appreciative of Joffre's "intervention" with Kitchener to give Sir John command of Rawlinson's forces.[70] But the counter-demand of the French for immediate engagement of British divisions had been resolved only with great difficulty and after the advent of Foch. The continuing good will of the French Command would depend on the extent to which the British, in the absence of their I Corps, pressed the march of their III Corps into the vital industrial region of Lille.

The Abortive March on Lille

The essential equilibrium of forces on the western front which, after successive manoeuvres, had produced the stalemate on the Aisne, continued to frustrate Allied operations on the extending flank. The French Second Army, operating north of the Oise, and the French Tenth Army extending to the La Bassée Canal, had failed to produce the desired envelopment. Typically, German forces arrived on time and in sufficient strength to thwart and even nullify small initial French advances. The last hope of decisive results therefore lay with the British, concentrating north of the La Bassée Canal. Only light enemy forces, mainly cavalry, appeared to bar the route to Lille and beyond.[71] French expectation therefore was very high.

The offensive of the British II Corps was pushed with vigour. Engaged on the Aire-Béthune line on October 11, by October 18 the II Corps had advanced to the Givenchy-Aubers Ridge position, performing creditably against solid German opposition, and suffering fairly heavy losses of 2,600 dead and wounded. The failure, moreover, of the Tenth Army on its right to advance as initially promised by Foch made progress of all but the Corps' left very difficult, as any move forward to the northeast tended to pull the line apart.[72]

---

[70] See Letter, Foch to Joffre, October 13, 1914, "Correspondance Foch (10 October 1914 - 21 January 1916)," AG, #2; cf. Letter, Kitchener to French, 11.10.14, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/32.

[71] See HGW (1914), II, 99.

The III and IV Corps, fighting around Ypres, on the other hand, did much less well. Getting off to a reasonably good start, the III Corps, which finished detraining at St. Omer on October 12, moved forward on October 13, with the support of Allenby's cavalry on its left, to a position five miles south of Ypres, where it was joined the next day by Rawlinson's cavalry retreating from Bruges behind the Lys, thus making the line to the sea continuous. From the 13th to the 18th, however, the III Corps and Rawlinson's IV Corps made little progress. Against the resistance of small but well-placed and determined enemy forces (the German Cavalry Corps having retreated out of the area on the 14th), the two corps advanced only about five miles, stalling on the right at Frelinghien just past Armentières on the Lys and on the line Zonnebeke-Zandvoorde on the left about 5 miles east of Ypres. Losses were light--1550 in the III Corps and only 275 in the 7th Division of the IV Corps.[73] The offensive on the British left, the purpose of which had been to forestall the enemy and free Lille, had obviously not achieved the amplitude nor the vigour anticipated by the French. The result was an acute crisis in command relations as sources now available--Foch's personal letters to Joffre, Poincaré's Notes Journalières and portions of Wilson's unpublished diaries--make abundantly clear.[74]

---

[72] HGW (1914), II, 77-85, 121. See Map 13, p. 419

[73] For an account of these operations, see HGW (1914), II, 94-121 and sketches 3-6 between pp. 68-69, 124-25. See Map 14, p. 419.

[74] Though laced with biting criticism of his superiors, Wilson's

. . .

As the march on Lille began, Foch nurtured considerable hope in the British offensive. "At the present moment, we attack toward Lille with the left of our Xth Army, 2 English Army Corps and 2 divisions of English Cavalry," he reported to the Commander-in-Chief on October 13. "I anticipate much from the English offensive," he continued. "It is resolute, slow as usual; but the Marshal has decided to seriously confront the adversary; he will get results."[75] Foch thus reflected much of the prewar stereotype of the British as slow but determined warriors. Two days earlier, Belin, the Major General at GQG, had expressed a similar opinion. We "have already lost much time," he told Herbillon, "in part because of the English." "They are very slow." "They always march well," he noted, "because they are remarkably courageous, but they are interminable in their preparations."[76]

On October 13, however, the British Command (which moved to St. Omer the same day) had more on its mind than the immediate offensive. The question of bases and a possible line of retreat from their new position on the Allied left in case of an emergency was their first concern and also a matter of concern to the British Government. "I hope you will not allow Joffre to deprive you of Dunkirk as your advanced base and fortified camp," wrote Churchill to Sir John French on October 11. "In view of the embarkation facilities, Calais or Boulogne ought

---

diary for this period, in the words of Callwell, who wrote Wilson's biography, throws considerable "light on a number of varying phases of the critical struggle which was developing about the Lys and Yser . . .," (Callwell, Wilson, I, 183), not the least of which was the crisis in Anglo-French command relations.

[75] Letter, Foch to Joffre, October 13, 1914, AG, "Correspondance Foch (10 October 1914 - 21 January 1916)," #2.

[76] Herbillon, Souvenirs, I, entry of October 11, 1914, p. 58.

to be entrenched too," he added.[77] "The English are slow to engage," wrote Berthelot. "The organization of their bases, at Dunkirk, Calais, and Boulogne, is the object of their most important preoccupation."[78]

Indeed, Sir John was "impressed by the continual reinforcement of the German right," which, "since the Belgian ports had fallen," threatened his left. He therefore began to consider, with the advice of Murray, the creation of a vast fortified zone about Boulogne which would "assure the freedom of his communications in any case and a refuge in case of failure."[79] "Last night," wrote Wilson on October 14, "Sir John & Murray were both contemplating retiring to a position at Boulogne. This is simply terrifying."[80] More in touch with British policy than Wilson, Sir John and Murray were obviously not prepared to stake the entire future of the BEF on the forthcoming offensive.

To counteract the overly-cautious approach of his superiors, Wilson turned to Foch, whom he asked "to write a letter to Sir John to prepare positions behind St. Omer & behind the R. Somme, so that the idea of going to Boulogne should be nipped at once." "Foch will send me a letter to Sir John tomorrow," he reported. "He quite understands."[81]

Wilson's intrigue with Foch to force the hand of Sir John and Murray created considerable turmoil at British Headquarters. Received on the 16th, Foch's letter proposing, "as an insurance against eventualities, the preparation of a defensive position along the Béthune-Aire-

---

[77] Letter, Churchill to Sir John French, October 11, 1914, in Churchill, The World Crisis, I, 368.

[78] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of October 13, 1914, p. 90.

[79] Weygand, Mémoires, I, 164; see Foch, Mémoires, I, 214.

[80] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 14, 1914.

[81] Ibid.

St. Omer Canal,"[82] produced a violent outburst from Sir John. "He would be d_____ if he would be dictated to by Foch who had better mind his own business," Sir John exploded, and ended "by saying he was going to base himself on Boulogne" in any case.[83] "Now this must not be," wrote Wilson. "Old 'Iron Ration' [himself] terribly disturbed & can't sleep."[84] Wilson, however, ultimately had his way with Sir John, who answered Foch's letter privately on the 17th.[85] But Sir John's modification to the suggestion of a defensive position along the series of canals rather unnerved Wilson, on October 19, at the end of "another maddening day." Sending for Brigadier-General G. H. Fowke, British Engineer-in-Chief, Sir John "ordered him to arrange trenches to be constructed from Dunkirk through Cassel by St. Pol round to Etaples about 60 or so miles." "I really think the man must be going dottie," Wilson observed.[86]

The massive entrenching was eventually accomplished with the help of several French territorial batallions.[87] But the idea of a great fortified camp at Boulogne to contain the entire BEF remained in Sir John's head and created no small stir at a conference with Joffre two days later.[88]

---

[82] HGW (1914), II, 83-84.

[83] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 16, 1914. Huguet and Wilson had read the letter "at Foch's wish" before passing it on to Sir John.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid., entry of October 17, 1914.

[86] Ibid., entry of October 19, 1914.

[87] HGW (1914), II, 84.

[88] See below.

British concern for preparing a safe retreat while taking the offensive was but one indicator of the prevailing caution at British Headquarters. As a result, vigourous conflict developed between the aggressive-minded Wilson and Sir John and Murray on the execution of the planned offensive. Foch and Huguet, of course, agreed with Wilson, who was entirely convinced of the need to "push, push, push," against the German cavalry on the British front before the arrival of additional German infantry corps.[89]

Wilson thus had a serious disagreement with Sir John and Murray on October 14 relative to the strategy to be adopted the next day.

> Sir John, Murray & I had a long discussion about tomorrow, [he recorded].
>
> The enemy appear to be entrenching 2 Corps (XIX & XII) along higher bank of R. Lys between Menin & Armentières with Cav[alry] prolonging to Estaires. It is quite clear we ought to take Estaires early tomorrow so as to get outside the Lys . . .
>
> Sir John would not agree to anything, & in the end said no one was to move till the Cav[alry] Corps reconnoitered! & he would receive reports at Hazebrouck at 12 noon. This is deplorable. He seemed quite unable to come to any decision involving fighting . . .
>
> We are losing the only opportunity we have had so far in this war.[90]

The opportunity was not quite as great as Wilson supposed. The German Cavalry Corps had indeed retreated behind the Lys, but the German Sixth Army (VII, XIII and XIX Corps and Cavalry Corps) had been ordered that very day to act, albeit defensively, on the line La Bassée-Armentières-Menin until the effect of a new Fourth Army, to be sent forward between Menin and the Sea, could be felt.[91] At the very best, therefore, the opportunity existed for only a tactical advance until encountering the full strength of the German Sixth Army. Inasmuch as the British were aware of the presence of the German XIX and XII Corps, forces equal to their own, one may well appreciate Sir John's reserve.

---

[89] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 13, 1914.

[90] Ibid., entry of October 14, 1914. "It really fills me with despair to have such a man as C. in C.," Wilson wrote. "He has gusts of childish passion but otherwise no sign of life, knowledge or decision." (Ibid.) Wilson's assessments, sometimes written under the frustration of the moment, must be taken with a certain reserve. See Maps 13, 14, p. 419.

[91] HGW (1914), II, 98.

Foch, however, arrived on the scene the next morning, "evidently" wishing to "binge up" Sir John. "Sir John talked as usual . . . . One moment he would drive the Germans into the sea; at the next he could not attack dismounted cav[alry] without careful reconnaissance."[92] He nonetheless agreed "to attack on both sides of the Lys from Armentières to Menin" as Foch and Wilson desired.[93] And Wilson, who went to Hazebrouck with Sir John at mid-day, "got into orders a real good move forward." "We have lost a day but even if we push now it will be something," he wrote hopefully.[94]

Blunted in offensive capacity by a shortage of officers,[95] the British Force, despite limited resistance, made slow progress on October 16 and 17 in the marshy tableland on the Lys which prevented the deployment of artillery. Nevertheless, the Lys was crossed and fortified below Armentières on October 16, and on the 17th the town was occupied. Rawlinson also pushed forward on the 16th to the Zonnebeke-Zandvoorde position east of Ypres.[96] "The English Army continues its offensive toward Coutrai," Foch reported on the 16th, and "again makes some progress today."[97]

---

[92] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 15, 1914.

[93] CT #4883, Foch to Staff, Romilly-sur-Seine, October 15, 1914, 5:55 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2874.

[94] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 15, 1914. See HGW (1914), II, 100-03, which, in effect, confirms Wilson's assessment that a day had been lost through inactivity.

[95] See Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entries of October 14, 15, 16, 1914. Sir John's reluctance to engage in an energetic offensive may be attributed in part, at least, to his lack of officers. "Sir John sent K. the best wire he has yet sent," Wilson noted on October 14, "demanding officers, saying their presence here meant failure or success." (Ibid., entry of October 14, 1914.)

Foch, meantime, was concerned about the Belgians who had retreated to the Yser from the Roulers-Thourout-Ostend position which he had asked them to hold on October 14.[98] GQG was also very anxious in view of an intelligence report indicating a new German corps marching toward Bruges. As the Belgians guarded the British left flank, it was entirely essential that they hold, said a note from Joffre.[99]

On October 16, Foch therefore visited Belgian Headquarters at Furnes, which, according to his account, was in "a state of great disorder and moral depression." Using his full capacity to inspire confidence, he attempted to pull together Belgian resistance. The Belgian Army must hang on to a strip of national territory, he told the Belgian King. German forces were second line troops, attacking only with artillery, not bayonets. They could therefore be resisted by digging in. French reinforcements would be sent, he promised, but the Belgian Army must resist until they arrived. The Belgian cause was too just and the trials too severe for providence not to reward them if they persisted, he concluded.[100]

---

[96] HGW (1914), II, 103-09.

[97] Letter, Foch to Joffre, 16.10.1914, "Correspondance Foch (10 October 1914 - 21 January 1916)," AG, #4.

[98] Letters, Foch to Joffre, 14.10.1914, 16.10.1914, AG, "Correspondance Foch (10 October 1914 - 21 January 1916)," #3, #4.

[99] CT, Commander-in-Chief to Foch, October 15, 1914, 10:30 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2861.

[100] Foch, Journées, AFF, entry of 16 October 1914, pp. 6-8. See Wanty, L'art de la guerre, II, 135.

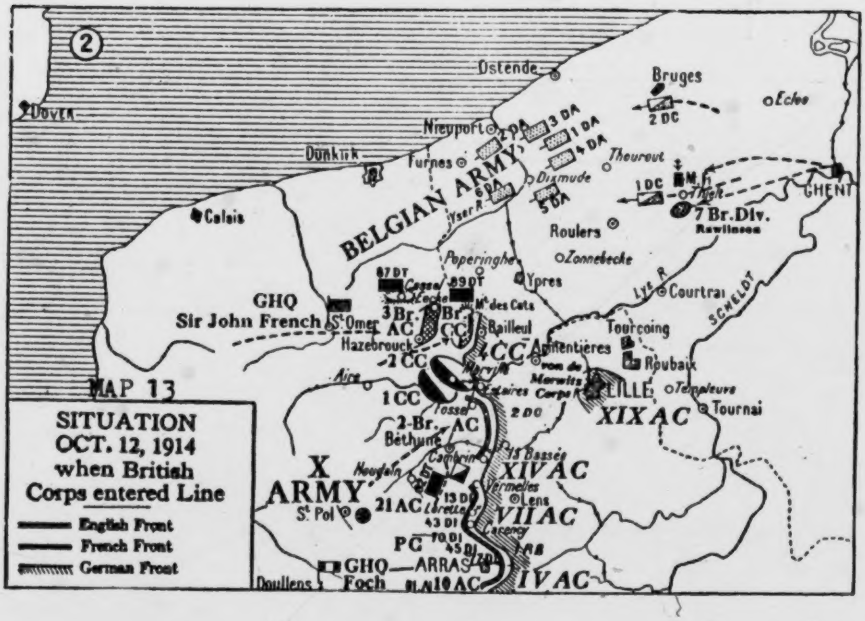
Fortified by these arguments and the promise of support, the Belgian King, who had agreed four days earlier to receive direction from GQG on the same basis as the British Command, gave the order to resist on the Yser and "to organize and defend it with the utmost energy." Foch, for his part, requested from Joffre that the Belgian Army, which he described with undue optimism as "neither tired nor destroyed," be sustained on its left by solid French forces.[101] On his way to Furnes, he had stopped at St. Omer to request that Rawlinson advance toward Roulers to divert the expected attack on the Belgians and, on the suggestion of Joffre, asked that the British Navy bombard the Ostend coast.[102] Assured of Belgian resistance on the Yser, Foch then turned his attention again to promoting the British offensive on the Lys which had begun to falter very badly.

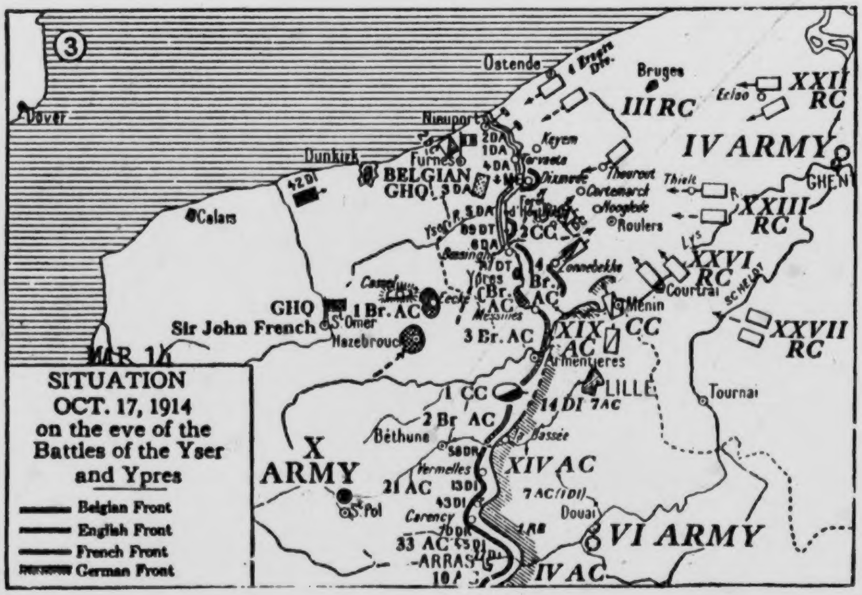
The breakdown of the British offensive on the Lys became a very bitter question at British Headquarters on October 17. "Sir John has no plan for the future," Wilson recorded, indicating the Commander's reluctance to pursue the offensive. Wilson's plan was to attack. He would insert the 19th Brigade held in reserve near Ypres into the gap covered by French cavalry between the II and III Corps and then move "along the Lys as far as Menin, seize Lille & there uncover the whole of the German

---

[101] Letter, Foch to Joffre, 16.10.1914, AG, "Correspondance Foch (10 October 1914 - 21 January 1916)," #4. See CT #197, Broqueville, Belgian Minister of War, to Grand Quartier Général, for Colonel D'Orjo, Belgian Liaison Officer at GQG, October 12, [1914], 12:29 a.m., AFGG, I(IV)-A(III), no. 2694; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of October 12, 1914, p. 189 with regard to the command arrangements. Cf. Wanty, L'art de la guerre, II, 135.

[102] Letter, Foch to Joffre, 16.10.1914, AG, "Correspondance Foch (10 October 1914 - 21 January 1916)," #4; Commander-in-Chief to Foch, October 15, 1914, 10:20 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 2861.


②
MAP 13
SITUATION
OCT. 12, 1914
when British
Corps entered Line
English Front
French Front
German Front
Dover
Ostende
Bruges
Nieuport
Dunkirk
Furnes
Calais
BELGIAN ARMY
Yser R.
Dixmude
Thourout
Roulers
Zonnebecke
Poperinghe
Ypres
Courtrai
Lys R.
Schelde
GHENT
7 Br. Div.
Rawlinson
2 DC
1 DC
GHQ
Sir John French
St Omer
Hazebrouck
Cassel
Bailleul
Armentières
Tourcoing
Roubaix
LILLE
Tournai
XIX AC
Aire
1 CC
2 CC
4 CC
3 Br. AC
Br. CC
2 Br. AC
Béthune
X ARMY
St Pol
21 AC
XIV AC
VII AC
Lens
Vermelles
PC
ARRAS
GHQ Foch
Doullens
10 AC
IV AC


③
MAP 14
SITUATION
OCT. 17, 1914
on the eve of the
Battles of the Yser
and Ypres
Belgian Front
English Front
French Front
German Front
Dover
Ostende
Bruges
Eecloo
XXII RC
III RC
IV ARMY
Nieuport
Dunkirk
Furnes
BELGIAN GHQ
42 DI
Calais
Keyem
Dixmude
Thourout
Cortemarck
Roulers
Thielt
GHENT
XXIII RC
XXVI RC
Courtrai
Menin
XXVII RC
Lys
Schelde
Ypres
Zonnebecke
4 Br. AC
3 CC
GHQ
Sir John French
St Omer
Hazebrouck
1 Br. AC
3 Br. AC
XIX AC
CC
Armentières
LILLE
Tournai
1 CC
14 DI
7 AC
2 Br AC
Béthune
X ARMY
21 AC
Vermelles
XIV AC
7 AC (1 DI)
Douai
VI ARMY
St Pol
Carency
33 AC
ARRAS
10 AC
IV AC

From Foch, Memoirs, between pp. 114-15.

right,"[103] much as decided two days earlier.

As a conference later in the day, Foch decidedly took up Wilson's cause. Wilson recorded the unusual results.

> At 3pm we had a meeting at Anvin (north of St. Pol) of Sir John, Archie [Murray], self, Huguet, Gen[eral] Foch and his Chief of Staff [Weygand].
>
> Sir John talked arrant nonsense & was so stupid, especially in his idea of the 'masking of Antwerp,' that Foch afterward said to Huguet that Sir John ought to be sent home at once & I ought to replace him.[104]

Such was Foch's conclusion after just nine days in close contact with the British Command! Foch, however, did not know all the intricacies of British politics! "I was absolutely ashamed at Sir J's ignorance and incapacity . . .," wrote his would-be replacement.[105]

Wilson nonetheless achieved his immediate goal at the meeting. Reducing the situation in writing to the sense he desired, "Sir J. & of course Foch, agreed."[106] After Foch's conference with Sir John on the 17th, firm orders were given for renewal of the British offensive. The II Corps was ordered to take La Bassée, the III Corps to march down the Lys and the IV Corps to attack Menin on the 18th.[107] "I had an hour-long conference with the Marshal," Foch reported to Joffre. "I persuaded him, not without difficulty, to resume the attack," he concluded, showing his growing irritation.[108]

The results, however, were very limited and especially disappointing to Wilson, Huguet and Foch, whose opposition to Sir John crystallized as a result. "A dreadfully disappointing day," wrote Wilson on October 18. "The II Corps (5 Div) made no real attempt to take La Bassée,"[109] he said, despite the fact that two unsuccessful attacks had been launched upon it.[110] "The French Cav[alry] between II & III Corps was 5 hours late in starting,"[111] he noted, which led Sir John to request from the French an "arrangement between neighbouring corps with regard to the times of departures and attacks."[112] "The III Corps did well & are now only 6 miles from Lille," Wilson recorded, but Huguet, in reporting its progress to Foch, was less satisfied. "The 3rd Corps advanced slightly," Huguet reported. "It appears to have encountered a difficult terrain, dotted with houses, over which there was incessant fighting, the advance of the infantry often being halted in the absence of strong support from the artillery."[113] Even Sir John was "disappointed" with Rawlinson, who had misinterpreted his orders for the IV Corps to advance on Menin and "never moved."[114] "He says that he was not ordered to attack Menin," Wilson observed, "but he was ordered to take a 'vigourous offensive' & move on Menin." "How that could be construed into doing nothing I can't imagine," he concluded. "So the day was greatly wasted."[115]

---

[103] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 17, 1914.

[104] Ibid. Presumably this remark was also reported to Joffre.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Ibid.

[107] HGW (1914), II, 109.

[108] Letter, Foch to Joffre, 18.10.1914, AG, "Correspondance Foch (10 October 1914 - 21 January 1916)," #6.

---

[109] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 18, 1914.

[110] Letter, Huguet to Foch, October 19, 1914, 8:00 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 3043.

[111] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 18, 1914.

[112] Letter, Huguet to Foch, October 19, 1914, 8:00 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 3043.

[113] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 18, 1914; Letter, Huguet to Foch, October 19, 1914, 8:00 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 3043.

[114] French, Diaries, entry of October 19, 1914, p. 160.

The French were equally upset. Huguet's report to Foch, the substance of which was communicated to Joffre, was a veritable dossier of grievances against the British Command. "All the delays, those at the beginning due to the hesitations of the High Command, those (recently) due to the hesitation of the executants," he reported with some justice, "are the most regretable." "Naturally the arrival of new German Corps has now been learned," he continued, "so that our entire advance risks being compromised."[116] "The English Army continues to attack with maddening (désespérante) slowness," Foch reported to Joffre on October 18. "We will not change them."[117]

On October 19 Wilson's frustration reached a crescendo as the British offensive finally ground to a halt. Advancing toward the Yser, the new German Fourth Army pushed back Rawlinson's force on the left. When news was received from Rawlinson which seemed to destroy any hope of a general advance, Major General W. P. Pulteney, commanding the III Corps at Frelinghien, just six miles west of Lille, decided that the ground to be gained was not worth the loss of life, and he, too, failed to attack.[118] "The entire attack has been wiped out," Huguet reported regretfully to Foch, "and preparation is being made, if not to retreat, at least to fight on the spot."[119] Sir John had, in fact, decided, that very evening, that the entire BEF would have to go on the defensive, except for the I Corps, just arrived from the Aisne, which, to Wilson's dismay, he ordered Haig to march on Bruges.[120]

---

[115] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 18, 1914.

[116] Letter, Huguet to Foch, October 19, 1914, 8:00 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 3043.

[117] Letter, Foch to Joffre, 18.10.1914, AG, "Correspondance Foch (10 October 1914 - 21 January 1916)," #6.

[118] HGW (1914), II, 133-36.

[119] Letter, Huguet to Foch, October 20, 1914, AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 3106.

The little offensive-minded coterie was desolate. "Our friend W. and his officers are heart-broken," Huguet reported to Foch. "We have had our chance, they say; we have not taken advantage of it; now it is too late."[121] "Another maddening day," wrote Wilson in his diary. "Owing to nothing but absolute incompetence, and want of regimental officers, we have lost the final opportunity of the war & are now going to be on the defensive." His conclusion was that to which Foch had come two days earlier: "Sir John ought to be sent home."[122] The only question remaining was the extent to which Joffre, who had largely been in the shadows since Foch's appointment[123] and not directly involved in the dispute, would react to British failure to march on Lille on this, the last real opportunity, before serious resistance was encountered all along the line on October 20.[124]

Wilson's frustrations, like those of Huguet and Foch, stemmed to a considerable extent from the puncturing of a bubble of false expectation: "I believe," wrote Wilson, "that if K. instead of making shadow armies had kept us up to full strength in regimental officers & NCO, which he could have done, we should now be east of Lille." That observation, plausible enough, was followed by a passage which showed his own inability to grasp the true nature of the war. "This would have started a retirement of the German right about La Bassée," he wrote, "which would have continued all along the Western face of the German line with results quite impossible to calculate but possibly expulsion of German troops from French soil!"[125] That, of course, was absurd. The British, it is true, might have taken Lille, but the tactical advantage thus gained surely would not have caused the great strategic roll-up of the German flank of Wilson's dreams. The growing strength of the defensive, as both sides learned the value of entrenchments, and the presence of the German Sixth Army just beyond the Lys, guaranteed that there would be no great strategic victory against the German flank at that time.

---

[120] French, Diaries, entry of October 19, 1914, p. 160; Letter, Huguet to Foch, October 21, 1914 (morning), AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 3145 and n. 2, p. 809; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 20, 1914.

[121] Letter, Huguet to Foch, October 20, 1914, AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 3106.

[122] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 19, 1914.

[123] See Clive Diaries, II/I, KCMA, entry of October 10, 1914.

[124] For an account of British action on the 20th, see HGW (1914), II, 138-47.

Sir John's great sin had been his failure to press the offensive with the desired energy. Fearing potential rather than actual forces in front of him, he had acted with excessive caution, in the absence of his entire force, on October 14th and 17th, renewing his attack only upon Foch's urging. The clash had been one of doctrine and approach. Sir John and Murray had proceeded methodically and with caution, preparing their retreat in harmony with the wishes of the British Government, while advancing with circumspection. Foch, as advocate of the offensive, favoured vigourous attack as a matter of principle. His erstwhile disciple, Wilson, and Huguet shared these views, which pitted them against Sir John and Murray.

---

[125] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 19, 1914.

Resisting Foch's leadership throughout, Sir John, however, despite his protests, complied in a general way with the wishes of Wilson and Foch both on the question of rearward defenses and the pursuit of the offensive. When offensive action broke down on October 14 and 17,. Foch through Wilson managed to obtain its renewal. Assisted by the supple and manipulative brain of Henry Wilson, Foch had in fact begun to establish his dominance over the British, but at the immediate cost of constant turmoil within the British Command.

As the French admitted in their communications, moreover, the offensive stalled not merely because of "hesitations" in the High Command. The executants, too, Rawlinson and Pulteney in particular, showed very considerable caution on October 18 and 19, and the BEF, even when engaged, seemed to move forward very slowly. Blunted by the lack of officers, it appeared unable to mount a sustained offensive against well placed defences in an area which made the deployment of artillery very difficult. That, however, was more a reflection of the growing power of the defensive which thereafter blunted further advances on both sides rather than a lack of good will on the part of the British Chief. The French might have given such factors more consideration in their assessment of Sir John's performance.

The Request for Sir John's Recall

At GQG, the British offensive was deemed quite unsatisfactory, at least by Berthelot, who made the following disparaging observation on October 19: "While the Belgians regain their morale and repel all attacks on their front, though really fatigued and short of munitions, the English advance timidly and only engage with circumspection."[126]

---

[126] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of October 19, 1914, p. 199.

And although no correspondence from Huguet and Foch incriminating Sir John has been found in the available files at the French War Archives,[127] Joffre's request for a meeting with Sir John on October 20[128] would suggest a desire to personally evaluate the situation, as in the case of Lanrezac on August 29, before deciding on the fate of the British Chief. Whatever Joffre's motives, it is clear from later events that he was fully apprised of Foch's and Huguet's dissatisfaction with Sir John, either prior to or during his trip to the north on October 20-21.[129]

To be fully understood, the discussion which took place between Joffre and the British Command on October 21 must be placed in the context of renewed conflict over operational plans between Sir John and Foch on October 20. The British offensive on the Lys having stalled on the 19th, Foch developed a new offensive plan, aimed at countering the advance of two new German corps reported marching toward the Belgian front.[130] Actually, these units were part of the new German Fourth Army consisting of four new reserve corps (badly trained young volunteers and the old men of the Landwehr), marching toward the Yser in an attempt to seize the remaining Channel ports, "obstruct England's Channel traffic," and roll up the Allied flank.[131] Foch's plan was to split the new German forces by attacking toward Bruges on the left, and Courtrai-Lille on the right. The Belgian Army, assisted by a new French division on the sea front, would attack on the left; new French forces, notably the IX Corps, would attack next to the Belgians, and the British would attack on the right.[132] The problem, however, was that Sir John wished to advance the British I Corps to Bruges on his left next to the Belgians in the place Foch wished for the French.[133] The issue of influence over the Belgian Army therefore came to the fore.

---

[127] In his Mémoires, Joffre makes frequent reference to "Dossiers strictement personnels et secrets du Commandant en Chef" which appear to contain correspondence relating to personnel. (See Joffre, Mémoires, II, passim.) Most of Joffre's papers are located at the French War Archives at Vincennes and are accessioned under the number 14N1-47. Some of the more confidential files, notably 14N1 and 14N47, which contain documents with regard to personnel and personal correspondence, are not yet available for research.

[128] CT #4436, Commander-in-Chief to Foch, 20 October, 1914, 10:00 p.m., AG, 16N1905, "Ordres et instructions relatifs aux Opérations," dos. #19, doc. #1664.

[129] See below. Wilson's diary does not give any indication of the extent to which he was involved with the French in their attempt to have him succeed Sir John French as Commander of the BEF.

[130] AFGG, I(IV), 312-15; HGW (1914), II, 121-22, 128.

The question was debated through Wilson, who, visiting Foch at Doullens on the afternoon of the 20th, "told him [of] Sir John's proposals, i.e. to send I Corps to Bruges! to take ground to his left with II & III Corps & to get the French to take up the Lys." "Foch listened & grunted and told me his plan," Wilson wrote, which was to have the Belgian Army, assisted by French forces on both sides, march on Bruges on October 27.[134] The British would advance toward Courtrai and Lille on the right.

When Foch's plan was relayed to Sir John, he "of course stormed at first, said he would report Foch to the Gov't for taking command of the Belgian Army [and that] he would not take his orders from a junior.[135] "I don't think Sir J. likes to be sandwiched in between 2 parts of a force, both of which are acting under the orders of a man who is not the C[ommander]-in-C[hief]," wrote Clive. "It is impossible for two commanders to run one show," he concluded; "the strongest ought to prevail."[136]

---

[131] See Falkenhayn, General Headquarters, pp. 9-17, 27-30.

[132] Letter, Foch to Joffre, 19.10.1914, AG, "Correspondance Foch (10 October 1914 - 21 January 1916)," #7; AFGG, I(IV), 314; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 20, 1914; HGW (1914), II, 127.

[133] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 20, 1914.

[134] Ibid.; cf. AFGG, I(IV), 314.

[135] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 20, 1914.

Sir John, nevertheless, maintained his plan.[137] But, "violent attacks" on the British right on October 20 obliged him to have his right and centre dig in, maintaining an aggressive posture only on his left, where the I Corps engaged fully on October 21. Violent German attacks all along the British front on October 21 then stalled its action (as Wilson had predicted), although its movement toward Bruges caused a lengthening of the front.[138]

The great German drive on Calais, much vaunted in the German press, had in fact begun. Danger to the BEF then raised anew the question of a safe line of retreat. " The Germans are trying to frighten England and that appears to succeed," wrote Berthelot, for [Sir John] French has swallowed the bait." "He looks behind himself and finds that he is far from his bases."[139]

On October 21, 1914, Joffre had a short but significant interview with Sir John French.[140] That morning, prior to the interview, he had met with Foch,[141] who presumably related all his difficulties with

---

[136] Clive Diaries, II/I, KCMA, entry of October 20, 1914.

[137] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 20, 1914; Clive Diaries, II/I, KCMA, entry of October 20, 1914.

[138] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of October 20, 1914, p. 203; Letter, Huguet to Foch, October 21, 1914, AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 3145; T., Huguet to Foch, October 20, [1914], 10:00 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 3107. See HGW (1914), II, 138-48, 163-64ff.

[139] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of October 20, 1914, p. 203.

[140] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 468-69.

[141] Ibid., p. 468. The meeting was held on the second day of

Sir John. As well, "Huguet had gone out to meet Joffre & had carefully prepared the ground."[142]

Wilson has provided the sole account of the meeting:

> General Joffre came to see Sir J. at 1:30. He explained the same story that Foch had told me, [for the attack on Bruges and Courtrai] with the addition that the whole of the IX Corps [instead of one division] goes to Ypres. All went satisfactorily until Sir J. asked for facilities to make a great entrenched camp at Boulogne to take the whole E[xpeditionary] F[orce].
>
> Joffre's face instantly became quite square and he replied that such a thing could not be allowed for a moment. He would make some works to safeguard against a coup-de-main, but an entrenched camp he would not allow. Sir J checkmated straight away and said I was to discuss the matter with Gen. Joffre. So that nightmare is over.[143]

But Joffre, who had little patience with military leaders, French or otherwise, who were not aggressive in their approach, reacted dramatically. Foch and Huguet's grievances with Sir John coupled with Sir John's renewed demand for a great entrenched camp had obviously made a considerable impression on him. On October 23, 1914, Poincaré made this surprising entry in his diary:

> Joffre is more and more unhappy with Marshal French who never makes up his mind to march and who, the day before yesterday [presumably the 19th] would have been able, says Penelon [liaison officer between GQG and the Government], to retake Lille without striking a blow.
>
> Joffre would like that we obtain French's recall from the English Government and his replacement by General Wilson. Penelon goes so far as to fear that French, under the pretext of defending Calais, will fall back to that city.
>
> But how to replace French, who is a personnage in England. By whom [and] in what way to approach Kitchener on a question so delicate? Perhaps if Kitchener were to come to Calais or to Dun-

---

Joffre's trip to the north which culminated in a visit to the Belgian King and Command at Furnes. (Ibid.)

[142] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 21, 1914.

[143] Ibid. "A change is made in the destination of the 9th Army Corps which, by request from the English, is directed toward Ypres," wrote Berthelot on October 22, 1914. (Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of October 22, 1914, p. 204.)

kirk while I am in the north [one week hence]. . . .[144]

The die had been cast. On October 26, Herbillon, the other liaison officer to the Government, further reiterated Joffre's grievances against Sir John, insisting that the failure of the manoeuvre on the left was due to the delays caused by the removal of the BEF to the north, which had been undertaken on British insistence.[145] A short history of the Battle of Flanders, emanating from the office of the Commander-in-Chief on November 19 for the use of French Ambassadors and Ministers abroad, amplified this theme. The British, it claimed, had "refused to fully engage" their III Corps until the arrival of their entire I Corps and the Lahore (Indian) Division on October 20. "As a result," the history concluded, "during this entire period, the British Army, of which the 2nd Army Corps had been engaged for a week at La Bassée, played no active role north of the Lys and was unable to fill the gap created by the retreat of the Belgians."[146] GQG thus maintained, in its rather biased interpretation of the event, the close connecting link between the dispute over the transfer of the BEF and Sir John's failure to march on the Lys and take Lille. The second crisis was presented as merely a prolongation of the first.

---

[144] Poincaré Papers, XXXVII, BN, NAF (16028), "Notes Journalières," September - December, 1914, entry of October 23, 1914, p. 126. Having consulted only British sources and Poincaré's unrevealing memoirs, Cassar, presents, in his recent biography of Kitchener, the traditional interpretation that Kitchener, on his initiative, offered to replace Sir John with Ian Hamilton at Dunkirk on November 1. (See Cassar, Kitchener, 249-50.) In his Mémoires, Joffre makes absolutely no mention of the subject of his discussion with Foch and Sir John on the 21st, nor of his decision to seek Sir John's recall and replacement by Wilson. (Joffre, Mémoires, I, 468.)

[145] Herbillon, Souvenirs, I, entry of October 26, 1914, pp. 62-63.

[146] "The Battle of Flanders," (Note intended for Ambassadors and Ministers of France), #35, AE, Série "Guerre 1914-1918," "Opérations Stratégiques," #979, p. 7.

Joffre, too, maintained this link in his Mémoires, although he was careful not to divulge his role in seeking Sir John's recall:

> I am obliged to say that the haste with which the British Army had itself relieved from the Aisne caused, as I predicted when the question arose, the almost complete interruption during ten days of the transport of French troops toward the northern theatre of operations. The definitive loss of the rich region centring on Lille was due in my opinion to this operation, consent to which I gave with the greatest regret.[147]

Sir John's failure to march on Lille was thus seen as merely the confirmation of GQG's earlier fears of British unwillingness to fight until fully assembled (if then). The failure of the manoeuvres to "inflict a serious check on the enemy right wing, re-occupy Lille and prevent the Germans from extending their invasion of French and Belgian territory," Joffre attributed to three main causes: the condition of the Belgian Army, the mixed quality of French troops deployed in the region, and the failure of the British III Corps," concentrated northeast of Hazebrouck on the 12th of October, to engage "until the 20th, after the move of the I Corps and the Lahore Divisions had been completed."[148]

Joffre's views and those of the French Command, as shown, were over-simplified and the result more of distrust than of careful assessment of the facts. Sir John does not appear to have been inspired by any intent to prolong the earlier dispute, but rather by a caution born of the danger of engaging superior forces. Yet, the caution which prevailed at British Headquarters and accounted in part for a less than energetic advance was the main element in French reluctance to allow the transfer of the BEF to the decisive flank. The concession of transferring the BEF, which Wilson had won from Joffre on the promise of greater participation from the BEF, had backfired. Lille had not been taken, and now heads must roll in retribution.

---

[147] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 458-59.

[148] Ibid., p. 470.

CHAPTER XI

BATTLE, COMMITMENT AND COMMAND: THE BATTLE OF YPRES AND THE DUNKIRK CONFERENCE OF NOVEMBER 1, 1914

The Dunkirk conference, when initially called by Poincaré, had as its sole purpose the discussion of a suitable replacement for Sir John French. By the time the conference convened, however, the demands of the intervening Battle of Ypres had elevated the question of British reinforcements to pre-eminence, while intervening adjustments in the command relationship and Sir John's aggressiveness during the Battle made his recall seem less appealing to the French. The most notable result of the conference was thus Kitchener's commitment of the New Army for action in France in the summer of 1915.

Responding with circumspection to Joffre's request on October 23 that he seek Sir John French's replacement by Wilson, the French President had Delcassé, the Foreign Minister, request three days later that Kitchener meet with Poincaré, Viviani and Millerand at Dunkirk on Sunday, November 1, 1914, while the French gentlemen were on a tour of the northern theatre. Paul Cambon, the French Ambassador in London, was instructed to accompany Kitchener to the meeting.[1]

While pleased to meet with the French President and Ministers,

---

[1] CT #500, [French] Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Ambassador of France at London, October 26, 1914, 10:50 p.m., AE, Série "Guerre 1914-1918," #534, p. 124.

Kitchener was somewhat taken aback by the lack of an agenda, and as no real issue appeared in need of resolution, he asked what items the French might wish to discuss so as to allow him to bring the appropriate technical documents. He also requested that the Field Commanders, Joffre, whom he had never met, and Sir John, be included in the meeting.[2] The conference was thus enlarged to include Joffre, and ultimately Foch, but Sir John was unable to attend on November 1 because of the critical nature of British operations at that moment.[3]

The French managed to find some items for the agenda. "It would be well for Lord Kitchener to bring documents relative to the successive arrival of new divisions," said the French, "and to the help given by the British Government to the French Government for the supply of material and munitions, notably for the 75's."[4] At some point, moreover, the main question to be discussed must have been broached by Cambon, for Kitchener came to the meeting prepared with a full-blown plan of his own for the replacement of Sir John French.[5]

Meanwhile, a very considerable drama had unfolded in Flanders as the German drive on Calais gave rise to the desperate and costly fighting known as the Battle of the Yser and the First Battle of Ypres. Their attempt to roll up the Belgian flank on the Yser having been frustrated by the flooding of the region, the Germans made desperate efforts at the end of October to break through the British front east and southeast of Ypres. The Allies resisted only with the greatest of difficulty, until the German Command, failing to breach the Allied line, abandoned the offensive on November 12.[6]

---

[2] T. #933, Cambon to Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, October 27, 1914, 21:20 p.m., AE, Série "Guerre 1914-1918," 534, p. 125.

[3] Letter, French to Kitchener, October 31, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/36.

[4] CT #518, [French] Minister of Foreign Affairs to Ambassador of France, London, October 28, 1914, 3:15 a.m., AE, Série "Guerre 1914-1918," #534, p. 126.

[5] See below.

During the preliminary encounter battle, a "curious mixture of open and trench warfare" which developed on the British front between October 20 and the end of the month,[7] Sir John recovered his self-confidence to a remarkable degree and fully engaged the BEF in vigourous and costly defensive-offensive operations. His renewed confidence may be attributed not only to the arrival of the I Corps and an Indian division on the 19th and a second Indian division on the 28th,[8] but also to satisfaction with the new French offensive plan as presented during Joffre's visit to Headquarters on October 21.

Although the stiff opposition encountered by the British I Corps on October 21 brought its advance toward Thourout (later changed to Courtrai upon Foch's request) to a halt and, as a result, obliged the entire BEF to go on the defensive,[9] Sir John took an unduly sanguine view of the situation in his report to Kitchener. "In my opinion the enemy are vigourously playing their last card," he wrote on October 22, "and I am confident they will fail."[10] His hopes were based on the fact that the Belgians were holding their ground, French reinforcements were arriving (42nd Division and IX Corps) to assist the Belgian offensive, and more particularly that "General Joffre and General Foch are both up in the Belgian theatre of war, and are intent on driving the Germans east."[11] That fact was of decisive importance in his calculation. The BEF would merely stand on the defensive until adequate forces arrived to resume the attack.[12]

---

[6] For a good short account of these battles, see Cruttwell, History of the Great War, pp. 93-107; HGW (1914), II, is devoted almost entirely to these two battles. For the German side, see Reichsarchiv, Der Weltkrieg, V, 272-401, VI, 10-33. For a good contemporary account, see Letter, Foch to Joffre, 13.11.14, AG, "Correspondance Foch (10 October - 21 January 1916)," #10 (printed in AFGG, I(IV) A(IV), no. 4252.)

[7] Cruttwell, History of the Great War, pp. 102-03.

[8] CT #4782, Commander-in-Chief to Huguet, October 22, 1914, 5:20 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(IV), no. 3188 and n. 3, p. 6.

[9] Huguet to General Commanding Northern Army Group [Foch], October 22, 1914, AFGG, I(IV) A(IV), no. 3190 and n. 1, p. 8; CT #1989, Huguet to GQG . . ., Foch, October 22, [1914], 10:00 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(IV), no. 3191; see HGW (1914), II, 168, 172.

Sir John therefore was not daunted by the events of October 22--the creation of a German bridgehead across the Yser against the Belgians and vigourous attacks all along his own line.[13] Although unwilling to meet Foch's request for a combined attack on the 23rd because of the late hour of receiving the request (2:00 a.m.), Sir John agreed to attack with his left on the 24th, as new French forces (17th Division of the IX Corps) came into play on his left.[14] Hopeful that the Germans might be driven from Ostend by the French and Belgians within a week,[15] Sir

---

[10] T F415, French to Kitchener, 22nd October 1914, 12:12 p.m., HGW (1914), II, Appendix 32, pp. 519-20.

[11] Ibid.; cf. HGW (1914), II, 168, 172.

[12] See Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 21, 1914; cf. HGW (1914), II, 168.

[13] CT #1989, Huguet to GQG, . . ., Foch, October 22, 1914, 10:00 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(IV), no. 3191 and n. 4, p. 9.

[14] HGW (1914), II, 183-84; cf. CT #1989, Huguet to GQG, . . ., Foch, October 22, 1914, 10:00 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(IV), no. 3191 and n. 4, p. 9.

[15] HGW (1914), II, 190-91.

John then ordered the British left wing (I, IV Corps, and Cavalry) to advance toward Courtrai in conjunction with the French IX Corps (under D'Urbal's Détachement d'Armée de Belgique), which was to march toward Roulers.[16] Thus, despite the very meagre results so far obtained and the intensity of German counter-attacks, Sir John reported to Kitchener with excessive optimism that "if things continued to go well, the battle was 'practically won.'"[17]

The French were impressed by this new British aggressiveness. "Marshal French whom I saw today," reported Foch on October 25, "is delighted, full of ardour, and decided to pursue his attack which, in effect, has begun toward Courtrai on the Lys."[18] And the next day Joffre addressed a very complimentary telegram to Sir John (for whose recall he had just asked) in an attempt to further hearten his offensive. The enemy, "at the end of his strength," is engaging his "last reserves," Joffre claimed, a situation to which the British Army "had greatly contributed," and for which he expressed his gratitude. " I have the conviction," he concluded, "that a general offensive of our troops, executed tomorrow, will allow us to obtain a significant success."[19]

Within the British Command, however, Sir John's abandon of reserve and complete acceptance of the Foch-Joffre offensive plan disturbed Murray, who again saw his influence with Sir John being eroded in favour of Wilson and the French. As a result, on October 24, the day the new offensive was ordered, conflict erupted at British Headquarters. "Murray was tiresome again about orders," wrote Wilson. Lambton, Sir John's personal secretary, then took up Wilson's cause and "had another long talk with Sir J. & . . . told him quite straight that Murray ought to be sent away as he was a positive danger, & no one from Corps Commander down had the slightest confidence in him." "I wonder what Sir J. will do," mused Wilson. "I am sorry for Murray but he ought to go."[20] Sir John, however, merely eased the situation by sending Murray on a three-day trip to London with instructions to report to the Government on the favourable prospects for the offensive.[21] In the meantime, Wilson, to his great delight, temporarily assumed the much-coveted post of Chief of the British Staff.[22]

---

[16] HGW (1914), II, 234-35; Army Operation no. 40 by Field Marshal Sir John French . . ., 24 October 1914, 10:00 p.m., HGW (1914), II, Appendix 33, pp. 520-21.

[17] HGW (1914), II, 335.

[18] Letter, Foch to Joffre, 25.10.1914, AG, "Correspondance Foch (10 October 1914 - 21 January 1916)," #8.

[19] CT #3779, Commander-in-Chief to General Foch, October 26, 1914, 10:50, [copy of T. to Sir John French], AFGG, I(IV) A(IV), no. 3378.

Murray's resistance to Wilson had, in effect, become a barometer of the extent of Foch's influence over the British Command. As Sir John, inspired by the hope of victory, gave full support to the French offensive plan, he too found less and less use for the advice of the cautious Murray. During Murray's absence, Sir John was completely under the influence of Wilson and the French and issued orders each day for continuation of the offensive toward Courtrai right up to October 29, despite the increasing intensity of enemy counter-attacks.[23] "Sir John

---

[20] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 24, 1914.

[21] HGW (1914), II, 241.

[22] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 24, 1914.

[23] See Army Operation Order no. 40, 24 October 1914, 10:00 p.m.; O(a) 758, 25th October 1914, 7:45 p.m.; O(a) 794, 26 October 1914, 6:15 p.m.; O(a) 817, 27th October, [1914], 6:30 p.m.; O(a) 837, 28th October 1914, 8:15 p.m.; O(a) 870, 29th October 1914, 7:50 p.m., HGW (1914),II, Appendices 33-38, pp. 520-22; Letter, Foch to Joffre, 13.11.14, AG, "Cor-

[is] like a 2 year old in Murray's absence," wrote Wilson on October 27. "Billy Lambton told me he could not believe the change would be so great," he noted. "Unfortunately Murray returns tomorrow."[24]

Sir John, however, unwisely communicated to Wilson his strong personal preference for him over Murray, further raising the expectation of the aspiring Sub-Chief. "Sir John told me this morning," Wilson wrote on October 28, the first day of Murray's return, "that had he known Murray was coming back so soon he would have stopped him. He said he would send him away again soon as possible." "I hope so," Wilson noted. "Poor man, he is quite unfit for his post."[25] The next day, Sir John again spoke to Wilson about Murray. "He realizes that Murray is not now the man for the place & I think he is determined to get rid of him," wrote Wilson. "He said I should succeed." "I told him he had better have a good look around, but he said that was all settled in his mind." "I am sorry for Murray," Wilson concluded, "but he is quite hopeless."[26]

There the matter rested for two weeks. Sir John had apparently made up his mind to give his Command a more aggressive stance by replacing Murray with Wilson, but failed to act on the matter immediately. The Sub-Chief then grew impatient and took the matter up with the French.[27]

---

respondance Foch (10 October 1914 - 21 January 1916)," #10, (printed in AFGG, I(IV) A(IV), no. 4252.)

[24] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 27, 1914.

[25] Ibid., entry of October 28, 1914.

[26] Ibid., entry of October 29, 1914.

[27] See below, Chapter XII, for French involvement in the Murray-Wilson feud and the final outcome.

In the meantime, while the British pursued their attack toward Courtrai, the Belgian Army resisted with the greatest of difficulty the German offensive on the Yser aimed at seizing Dunkirk and Calais and rolling up the French flank. As the German offensive got fully underway after October 18, the Belgian Army, supported only by the French Fusiliers Marins Brigade at Dixmude and after October 20 by part of the French 42nd Division at Nieuport, resisted courageously but finally started to give way. On October 24, the Germans broke through the middle of the Belgian line on the Yser, endangering the entire Allied left flank.[28] Faced with this grave situation, Foch ordered a brigade (of the 42nd Division) to strengthen Belgian resistance at Ramscapelle and made a personal visit to Furnes to stiffen the Belgian will to resist.[29] As a new line of defence, he suggested the Nieuport-Dixmude railway behind the Yser, without any comprehension (by his own admission) of its strategic value as a dike.[30]

Ramscapelle, taken by the Germans, was then recaptured with the help of the French. On October 26, under renewed German pressure, the Belgian Army, which had borne the brunt of the fighting for more than a week, retreated behind the railway and opened the dikes on the left bank of the Yser against the enemy.[31] By the 29th, "the inundation began to cause difficulty to the enemy drawn up behind the railway," Foch reported, and on November 1 and 2 the Germans were obliged to retreat behind the Yser, leaving "several batteries of artillery stuck in the mud."[32] The solution arrived at was more a question of piecemeal improvisation than any over-all defensive plan. Due to the gallant efforts of the Belgians, however, and timely French support, the Allied left flank was now secure, safely anchored at Nieuport on the sea.

---

[28] Foch, Journées, AFF, pp. 9-10; Letter, Foch to Joffre, 13.11.14, AG, "Correspondance Foch (10 October 1914 - 21 January 1916)," #10; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of October 24, 1914, p. 206; Note (of Deputy Chief of Belgian Army Staff, Wielemans) for the Head of the French Military Mission at Belgian HQ, October 24, 1914, about 1:30 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(IV), no. 3330 and n. 1, p. 127; Wanty, L'art de la guerre, II, 135-36.

[29] Foch, Journées, AFF, pp. 9-10; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of October 24, 1914, p. 206; Letter, Foch to Joffre, 25.10.1914, AG, "Correspondance Foch (10 October 1914 - 21 January 1916)," #8. Foch, who claims to have again found the Belgian Command in a state of disorder and confusion (Foch, Journées, AFF, pp. 9-10), moved his HQ from Doullens to Cassell on the 25th to be nearer Belgian Headquarters at Furnes. (Letter, Foch to Joffre, 25.10.1914, above cited.)

[30] Foch, Journées, AFF, p. 10.

Contained on the Yser, the Germans threw all available forces against the British about Ypres at the end of October in a second attempt to break through to the sea. The British line, which extended over approximately 45 kilometres, was not sufficiently dense to resist an all-out offensive.[33] Fortunately for the Allies, additional French forces arriving in the area by rail became available to be injected into the line, often in the nick of time, to sustain its weak points. Necessity thus led to a very considerable mixing of British and French units as crisis followed upon crisis on the field of battle.

---

[31] Ibid., pp. 10-12; Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of October 26, 1914, p. 209; Wanty, L'art de la guerre, II, 136-38 points out that French sources exaggerate the extent of French help which really was received only in extremis.

[32] Letter, Foch to Joffre, 13.11.14, AG, "Correspondance Foch (10 October 1914 - 21 January 1916)," #10; cf. Falkenhayn, General Headquarters, p. 33. Wanty claims the most crucial part of the battle was over before the flooding took effect. (L'art de la guerre, II, 137-38.)

[33] See Letter, Foch to Joffre, 13.11.14, AG, "Correspondance Foch (10 October 1914 - 21 January 1916)," #10 (reproduced in AFGG, I(IV) A(IV), no. 4252); "The line is about 32 miles long," Clive wrote on October 30, 1914, after talking with Sir John and learning of his anxieties for the condition and morale of his troops. (Clive Diaries, II/I, KCMA, entry of October 30, 1914.) The estimated length of 32 miles, or about 51 kilometres, appears too long. See "Location of Anglo-Franco-Belgian Forces on the evening of October 24, 1914," AFGG, I(IV), Map #34; "The Battle of Ypres, 1914, 26-29th October, 1914," HGW (1914), II, sketch 6, between pp. 240-41. The rest of the British front between Frelinghien and La Bassée, not shown on these maps, was approximately 20 kilometres. In the course of the Battle, the French took over 10 kilometres of the active front. (See Foch, Mémoires, I, 241-42.)

Foch, however, had another motive for this method of deployment, which, incidently, was criticized by GQG on tactical grounds.[34] The British "make war like a sport," he told Poincaré on November 1. "After having fought two or three days, they want to rest and think of reliefs, which upsets everything."[35] Foch thus developed a technique to keep the British fully engaged at all times. Foch "refuses to relieve them with French divisions as they request," a member of the Third Bureau reported after an interview with Foch on November 5, "but he guarantees that they will always find him beside them for support." "By appealing to British loyalty and honour, he manages to persuade them, and they hold."[36] Under Foch, the nexus of French and British forces, peculiarly manifest during the First Battle of Ypres and later by design in Artois and on the Somme, became a doctrine for leading the British into battle.

The full implications of this technique became evident during the crisis of October 30 and 31, when the Germans threatened to roll back the British line. An excerpt from Foch's unpublished Journées indicates the nature of the first crisis on October 30th:

> The Battle of Ypres has been going on for several days. English cavalry, on a front of 15 kilometres, link the right of the British I Corps to the left of the British III Corps via Hollebecke,

---

[34] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of October 27, 1914, p. 210; CT 5424, Commander-in-Chief to Foch, October 25, 1914, 11:50 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(IV), no. 3335; CT 5865, Commander-in-Chief to Foch, October 27, 1914, 9:55 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(IV), no. 3423.

[35] Poincaré Papers, XXXVII, BN, NAF (16028), "Notes Journalières," entry of November 1, 1914, p. 142.

[36] Alexandre, Avec Joffre, p. 176.

> Wyschaete, Messines. On the 30th, they lose Zandworde, and Hollebecke; St. Eloi is seriously threatened. Ypres and all her communications are in jeopardy. The danger is great. So much more so as the English do not have any reserves.[37]

Sir John, however, was more concerned about the situation of his I Corps just to the north, where a serious crisis was also brewing. That evening urgent messages were sent to Foch asking that the three French batallions already promised in support of Haig's I Corps be increased.[38] No word, however, was received on the situation about St. Eloi. "As is their custom," wrote Foch, "when the news is bad, they remain silent." Unable to obtain adequate information from Wilson on the telephone, Foch then set out in person for British Headquarters, where he arrived about midnight.[39]

> I see Wilson, explain the situation to him, ask him theirs, which is clear; they have nothing available. On the morning of the 31 I will have 8 batallions (of the 16th Army Corps). I can provide these to them as support, to occupy Wyschaete, to defend St. Eloi, . . ., naturally, he accepts . We go to find the Marshal to whom we communicate this. . . . He is deeply moved, touched, troubled, grateful for my initiative; . . . "You are rendering me a great help," he tells me. He thanks me . . . there is not a moment to lose.[40]

By promptly sending these eight batallions of the 32nd Division

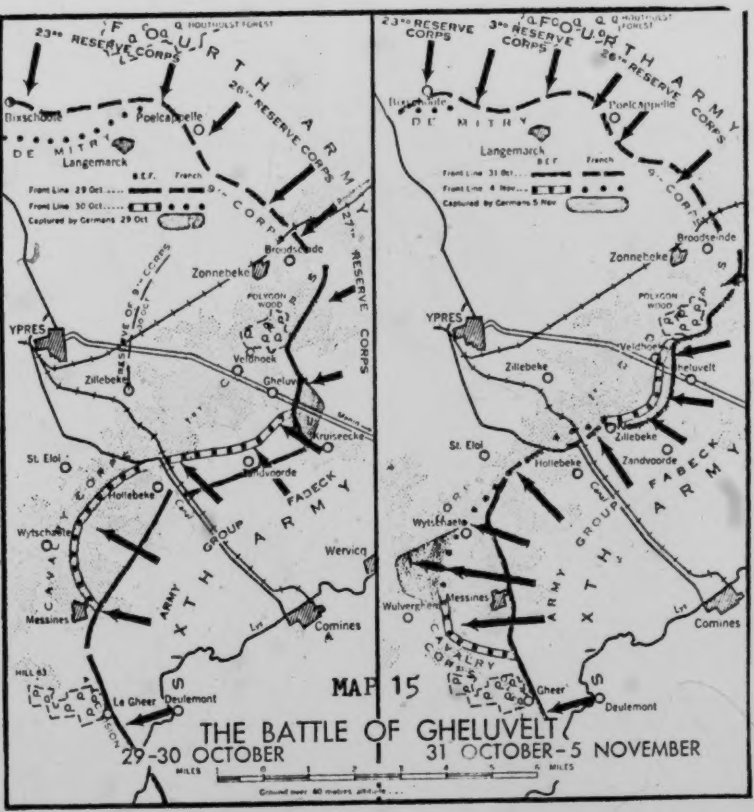
---

[37] Foch, Journées, AFF, p. 14; cf. Foch, Mémoires, I, 214-16; Weygand, Mémoires, I, 170. See Map 15, p. 444.

[38] Letter, French to Kitchener, October 31, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/36; CTs 1541-2, Huguet to Staff, Cassel, October 30, 1914, 9:00 p.m., 9:55 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(IV), nos. 3547-48. Cf. "Note on the relations between French and English Staffs," October 30, 1914, AFGG, I(IV) A(IV), no. 3552 and ns., p. 322. See Map 15, p. 444.

[39] Foch, Journées, AFF, p. 14. Cf. Foch, Mémoires, I, 215-16; Weygand, Mémoires, I, 170-71. "The Marshal just came down from his bedroom," Weygand wrote. "He had got out of bed and hastily put on his evening dress, a blue tunic, from the sleeve of which indiscreetly peered the embroidered border of his night shirt." (Ibid., p. 171.)

[40] Foch, Journées, AFF, pp. 14-15. Cf. Foch, Mémoires, I, 216-17; Weygand, Mémoires, I, 171. See CT #1546, Huguet [to GQG], October 31, 1914, 12:00 noon, AFGG, I(IV) A(IV), no. 3631.


MAP 15
THE BATTLE OF GHELUVELT
29-30 OCTOBER
31 OCTOBER-5 NOVEMBER
FOURTH ARMY
23RD RESERVE CORPS
3RD RESERVE CORPS
26TH RESERVE CORPS
27TH RESERVE CORPS
DE MITRY
HOUTHULST FOREST
Bixschoote
Poelcappelle
Langemarck
Broodseinde
Zonnebeke
POLYGON WOOD
YPRES
Veldhoek
Gheluvelt
Zillebeke
Kruiseecke
St. Eloi
Hollebeke
Zandvoorde
Wytschaete
Messines
Wulverghem
Wervicq
Comines
Le Gheer
Deulemont
Lys
CAVALRY CORPS
ARMY GROUP FABECK
SIXTH ARMY
Front Line 29 Oct
Front Line 30 Oct
Captured by Germans 29 Oct
Front Line 31 Oct
Front Line 4 Nov
Captured by Germans 5 Nov
B.E.F.
French
MILES

From Canada, Historical Section, General Staff, The Western Front, p. 165.

by automobile, immediately upon their arrival at Elverdinghe (from Compiègne by rail), and other forces as they became available, the situation was restored. Without his night-time intervention, Foch concluded, with perhaps a touch of exaggeration, "everything would have given way. The English Army first, then Ypres, which would have caused the rout of the entire left . . . ."[41] And indeed, in recognition of Foch's generosity, Sir John wrote him a very warm letter of thanks for this timely assistance, by which, he said, the situation had been restored.[42] By vigilance, initiative and solidarity during the crisis, Foch thus began to ingratiate himself more thoroughly with the British Chief.

Sir John's report to Kitchener was somewhat less glowing, however. Placed under Haig's command, the eight French batallions were again on hand for counter-attacks on November 1, but, according to Sir John, afforded little comfort on October 31 just as a new crisis developed at Gheluvelt in his I Corps. "It is always difficult to get in touch quickly with French reinforcements because they are generally late and their Staff arrangements are not the best," he wrote, but he noted "they have a way of their own which, when they really do begin, is very effective." Foch, moreover, he said, "was very desirous of giving all the help he could as he has always been."[43]

Foch's moral ascendancy was more fully established the next day, as a more serious crisis arose. On October 31, the British I Corps lost Gheluvelt southeast of Ypres in a violent German attack; and, to make matters worse, the commanders of the two divisions and several of their staff officers were either killed, wounded or badly shaken as a shell fell on their headquarters at the Hooge castle.[44] Foch recorded the dramatic and decisive interview with Sir John which took place at Vlamertinghe shortly after 2:00 p.m.:

---

[41] Foch, Journées, AFF, p. 15; with regard to the movement of the 32nd Division, see Foch, Mémoires, I, 216-17; CT 5865, Commander-in-Chief to Foch, October 27, 1914, 9:55 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(IV), no. 3423.

[42] Personal letter, French to Foch, n.d. (during the Battle of Ypres, 1914, in French's hand), AFF, Marshal French file; Weygand, Mémoires, I, 174-75; HGW (1914), II, 348-49.

[43] Letter, French to Kitchener, October 31, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/36. Cf. HGW (1914), II, 348-49.

> . . . The Marshal himself arrives. He paints the blackest picture of the situation. That is also the impression of the liaison officers (Major Jamet in particular . . . .) The English I Corps is in a state of complete disorganization and disorder; the two divisional generals in full retreat, two or three kilometres behind Ypres . Nothing more can be done. The Marshal is going to order a retreat. . . .
>
> I oppose it with all the strength in my power and most especially by the force of my arguments. The order absolutely forbidding retreat under any condition must be maintained; it is necessary to hold at any price. Any movement to the rear would be the signal for a thrust forward by the enemy which would sweep us away definitively and would remove all possibility of establishing a second line. The Corps must hold at any price, at least until evening . We will continue to sustain it by attacking on the left and the right.
>
> The Marshal becomes furious, declares that it is absolutely impossible . . . that his only recourse is to go and get himself killed with the I Corps if I maintain my way of thinking . . . .
>
> I reply that he must not get himself killed, but maintain his orders and his troops. That is the only way to save the current situation. Any other decision would compromise it for a long time. It would be a disaster of the gravest consequences.
>
> The Marshal's face is red as a rooster's comb; he again declares that it is impossible. I fully maintain my point of view, my firm decision to continue the action whatever it costs, to sustain the English I Corps with every available force, which will engage in the midst of fleeing English troops, and will attack on their right and on their left, rather than retreat. On the morrow, when I again have other reinforcements, I will resume the attack.
>
> Overpowered, but not convinced, he resigns himself not to order a retreat, to maintain his I Corps in place (it was still there on November 12, proving that it could hold), to follow my directives.[45]

---

[44] Foch, *Mémoires*, I, 217-18; Weygand, *Mémoires*, I, 171-72; *HGW* (1914), II, 323-24. CT #1567, Huguet to . . . *GQG* , . . ., October 31, [1914], 10:21 p.m., *AFGG*, I(IV) A(IV), no. 3632.

[45] Foch, *Journées*, *AFF*, pp. 15-16; the marginal date is incorrectly given as November 1 in this source. See Foch, *Mémoires*, I, 217-19; Weygand, *Mémoires*, I, 171-73; "Note on Relations between the English and French Staffs," October 31, [1914], *AFGG*, I(IV) A(IV), no. 3640.

By the force of his personality and the sheer will to hold the line, with or without the British, and to attack if necessary, even in the midst of their retreat, Foch persuaded Sir John to hold the line. Foch's account demonstrates the full extent to which his leadership was accepted:

> In the meantime I had written the line of conduct to be followed on a sheet of paper so that some indication of my intentions remained. I gave the paper to the Marshal just as we were about to part; he had the integrity to take it, to write on the back, "Execute what General Foch has written," and to send it to his troops. General Haig undoubtedly.
>
> His abstention and our action continued to prolong the battle and finally result in success.[46]

In endorsing Foch's instructions, Sir John signified his full acceptance of Foch's right to lead. That right was established, not by any act of state, but by the sheer weight of personality. This was Foch's finest hour. The compelling power, moreover, of Foch's system of strong enclosing forces and help in time of crisis was fully vindicated. By execution of his instructions, the situation was restored (though not without grave anxiety), and the line held until new French forces, ultimately the equivalent of four divisions and a Cavalry Corps, were thrown into the salient to strengthen Allied resistance.[47]

Undoubtedly Foch exaggerated the seriousness of ceding small amounts of terrain and the importance of Ypres as a communication centre. Moreover, the Ypres salient to which he clung so tenaciously was to prove very costly to hold during the following years, as the Germans dominated the Allied line and the city with their artillery from the crest of the surrounding ridge.[48] Nevertheless, Foch's assessment was essentially correct. The Allied line, after all, had but little depth for manoeuvre before reaching the sea. Any major breakthrough could have proven disastrous, as he had predicted.

---

[46] Foch, Journées, AFF, pp. 16-17; cf. Foch, Mémoires, I, 217-19; Weygand, Mémoires, I, 173. See "Note given to Marshal French," Vlamertinghe, October 31, 1914, 3:00 p.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(III), no. 3636 and ns., pp. 386-87; "Note for the British Army (given to General Wilson, British [Sub] Chief of Staff), October 31, [1914], AFGG, I(IV) A(IV), no. 3637 and ns. 2-3, p. 387.

[47] See HGW (1914), II, 342-43, 358-59, and "The Battle of Ypres, 1914 -- 1st - 4th November, 1914," sketch 12, between pp. 348-49, 388-89.

The Dunkirk conference of November 1, 1914, thus happened in the midst of a very hot battle, and one which found the circumstances leading to the meeting very considerably altered. Sir John, after a magnificent demonstration of caution between October 13 and 21, had then given evidence of very considerable, even unrestrained aggressiveness in pursuit of the joint offensive until the end of the month. Foch, moreover, had finally established his ascendancy over the British chief and the liaison system with Wilson was much to his liking. The question of Sir John's replacement therefore was likely to be viewed in a different light than when first proposed.

The conference convened at 4:00 p.m. in the parlour of a private home in Dunkirk. Lord Kitchener, Paul Cambon, Poincaré, Millerand, Ribot (French Minister of Finances), and ultimately Foch, who arrived at 6:30 p.m. after the conference had removed to the drawing room of a hotel awaiting dinner, were the main participants. In Foch's absence, Weygand, his Chief of Staff, gave a report on the military situation.[49] Sir

---

[48] See HGW (1914), II, 73ff, 128-31, for an assessment of the topography about Ypres.

[49] Foch, Journées, AFF, p. 17; Weygand, Mémoires, I, 175; Foch, Mémoires, I, 224-25. De Brocqueville, the Belgian Prime Minister, joined the group for dinner. (See Poincaré Papers, XXXVII, BN, NAF (16028), "Notes Journalières," entry of November 1, 1914, p. 143; cf. Joffre, Mémoires, I, 447.)

John, as indicated, was unable to attend because of the "important" and precarious counter-offensive operations under way to restore the British front.[50]

Lord Kitchener, clad in military uniform, came to the conference in a very "discouraged and pessimistic" frame of mind.[51] According to Cambon, who journeyed with him, he arrived "completely collapsed, demoralized, and seeing everything in black."[52] Kitchener's frame of mind had a considerable bearing on the outcome of the conference. Before the meeting, "Lord K. called me up on [the] telephone from the British consulate at Dunkirk," Wilson reported, and "ask[ed] for [the] situation." "I told him." "He was upset," Wilson reported, and "asked if he could do anything." "I replied, for the moment No, but send us more troops."[53] The urgency of the military situation thus predicated that much of the conference turn on the need for reinforcements, which had now become the major issue.

Fully informed by Sir John not only of the general situation but of the urgent need for strong reinforcements for the endangered British I Corps,[54] Kitchener "endeavored to impress" on the French, whom he found in "an unduly optimistic mood," "the importance of giving prompt and more adequate help to the British troops, who are bearing the brunt of the fighting."[55] "Kitchener considers the German offensive overwhelming," Poincaré observed, "and he fears that the English Army might give way." "The English have, in effect, ceded a little ground," he wrote.[56]

---

[50] Letter, French to Kitchener, October 31, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/36.

[51] Poincaré Papers, XXXVII, BN, NAF (16028), "Notes Journalières," entry of November 1, 1914, p. 142.

[52] So Foch learned from Cambon. Foch, *Journées*, *AFF*, p. 18.

[53] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 30, 1914.

[54] Letter, French to Kitchener, October 31, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/36.

Privately, the French resented British demands for relief. "As soon as they have fought two or three days," wrote Poincaré, "they want to rest and think of reliefs which disorganize everything." "General Foch, who came to Dunkirk, informed us of this situation," he continued. "The English make war like a sport and they always require time out for rest." "Foch has been obliged to send French troops to support the English and to counter-attack." "In reality," he concluded with little generosity, "it is we who today withstand the entire German effort from Nieuport to Belfort."[57]

Although both French and British felt that their portion of the fighting was unduly heavy, the Allies responded to the crisis with renewed solidarity and promises of mutual assistance. Joffre believed that as a result of the successful Russian offensive on the Vistula, the fighting would be over in two or three days.[58] In response to Kitchener's pleas for reinforcements, he nonetheless promised another corps for November 2 and asserted that by the 15th, 200,000 additional Regulars would be available.[59] Poincaré emphasized the French Government's determination "to continue the struggle through to victory, whatever it might cost, but he insisted to Lord Kitchener that England not delay too long the reinforcements promised."[60]

---

[55] Letter, Asquith to the King, November 3, 1914, PRO, Cab 41/35/56 R/193.

[56] Poincaré Papers, XXXVII, BN, NAF (16028), "Notes Journalières," entry of November 1, 1914, p. 142.

[57] *Ibid.*

[58] Poincaré Papers, XXXVII, BN, NAF (16028), "Notes Journalières," entry of November 1, 1914, p. 143; see Alexandre, *Avec Joffre*, p. 174 (entry of 27-28 October, 1914).

The question of immediate British reinforcements was raised even more dramatically by Foch, who joined the conference in the hotel drawing room at 6:30 p.m. His role is best related by himself:

> With eagerness, I am asked for news of the day. I recount the situation of the last three days[:] the furious and repeated German attacks, the losses, in particular of the French I Corps, the worn state of all our troops, but our firm intention to hold just the same, to repel every German attempt; the arrangements made for the day after tomorrow, the resources which arrive . . .
>
> Everyone listens with interest, the President surprised to fall, not upon a victory, but upon a hot battle.[61]

Punctuating his report with repeated assertions that "We will hold, we will hold" in an attempt to lift Kitchener's morale,[62] Foch concluded his moving oration, itself very comforting to the British Secretary of State for War, with a request for the dispatch of British reinforcements as soon as possible.[63] "My report finished," Foch recorded, "Kitchener took up the conversation and announced a magnificent English Army of a million men for July 1, 1915, and put forth a few other monstrosities of this nature."[64] "We do not ask for so much but we would like it sooner and without delay," came the French reply.[65] The French still believed in a short war and therefore were more interested in immediate reinforcements than in long term plans. They were too short-sighted to realize that Kitchener, under the pressure of the crisis, had for the first time formally committed the entire New Army to action in France.

---

[59] Letter, Asquith to the King, November 3, 1914, PRO, Cab 41 35/56 R/193.

[60] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 477.

[61] Foch, Journées, AFF, p. 17; cf. Foch, Mémoires, I, 225.

[62] Poincaré Papers, XXXVII, BN, NAF (16028), "Notes Journalières," entry of November 1, 1914, p. 143. Foch's energetic report, according to Cambon, completely lifted the gloom from Kitchener's mind and boosted his morale. (Foch, Journées, AFF, file "Paul Cambon et F. Foch.")

[63] Foch, Mémoires, I, 225.

For the immediate future, however, Kitchener, to French dismay, was able to promise only 11 more batallions of select Territorials, bringing the total in France to 19.[66] "Kitchener speaks very seriously of the possibility of a German landing in England," wrote Poincaré,[67] explaining British unwillingness to send other forces, notably the 8th Division still in Britain. The French politicians in fact were sufficiently troubled by Kitchener's long term strategy for victory as to inquire via the diplomatic channel if he really intended to discontinue the war. The French, of course, were reassured that "there is no hesitation here on the part of K. or anyone else about the War."[68]

---

[64] Foch, Journées, AFF, pp. 17-18.

[65] Foch, Mémoires, I, 225. Foch's later claim that he fully appreciated the value of Kitchener's long-term strategy (Foch, Mémoires, I, 225; Weygand, Mémoires, I, 175-76) hardly bears the weight of evidence.

"After talking with General Joffre about the situation and my needs, I took leave of the President," wrote Foch in derision of the politicians, ". . . abandoning the meeting to its idle concerns." Foch, Journées, AFF, p. 18.)

[66] Letter, Asquith to the King, November 3, 1914, PRO, Cab 41 35/56 R/193; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of November 1, 1914; Letter, French to Kitchener, October 31, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/36; CT #986, Cambon to [French] Ministry of Foreign Affairs, November 4, 1914, AE, Série "Guerre 1914-1918," #534, p. 143. These battalions were formed from the "best elements" of the Territorial Army. (Ibid.)

[67] Poincaré Papers, XXXVII, BN, NAF (16028), "Notes Journalières," entry of November 1, 1914, p. 142. Kitchener confided that he had "found the English War Ministry without preparation and now everything had to be done." (Ibid.)

The disputed British 8th Division, however, was soon dispatched. Indeed, since October 28, the British Command had made very pressing demands on London for that Division to be sent to the front.[69] But Kitchener had been reluctant to send it across the Channel, as it stood in "urgent need of further training."[70] After his visit to Dunkirk, however, when informed that the 7th Division had been "reduced to 5000 effectives," less than one-third strength, he persuaded the Cabinet that it was "necessary to run the risk of dispatching" the 8th Division, which was done on November 5.[71] As he had done after his September 1 visit to Paris, when fully apprised of the urgency of the situation by on-the-spot investigation, Kitchener was willing to dispatch every available force to the front. The same mechanism had led him to promise the New Army to the French for the next summer.

The military crisis thus had a dramatic impact. In response to the critical situation on the battlefield, both Joffre and Kitchener, despite the attempt by each to have the other's forces carry a heavier burden, had come forth with much needed reinforcements. The French were prepared to guarantee the immediate situation by an additional corps and the promise of 200,000 men by the 15th of November; Kitchener, though able to do little at once, was ready to guarantee ultimate victory by promising a million men by July 1, 1915. The New Army was thus committed to the French as early as November 1, 1914, not during the summer of 1915, as is commonly believed.[72] That Kitchener's promise to the French was in harmony with Cabinet policy, moreover, is demonstrated by Churchill's draft of a message on September 17 for the Acton mass recruiting meeting: "We must win this war," he wrote, "but the only sure way is to send Sir John French an army of at least a million men, and to maintain it at full strength in spite of losses."[73] Indeed, until the implications of trench warfare began to weigh on the minds of British Cabinet at the end of 1914,[74] the purpose and destiny of the Force had never been brought into question.

---

[68] Cassar, Kitchener, p. 249 and n. 54, p. 505.

[69] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of October 28, 1914.

[70] Letter, Asquith to the King, November 3, 1914, PRO, Cab 41 35/56 R/193.

[71] Ibid.; CT 986, Cambon to [French] Ministry of Foreign Affairs, November 4, 1914, AE, Série "Guerre 1914-1918," #534, p. 143.

The question of Sir John's replacement was also discussed. "Recently," wrote Poincaré, "he [Joffre] wanted Marshal French to be replaced and he had asked us to obtain the nomination from Kitchener of another General-in-Chief: a difficult diplomatic undertaking."[75] Kitchener, as a result, "arrived with the intention of sacking Marshal French, his old enemy . . . ."[76] In the meantime, however, the French had lost their enthusiasm for a change. "Under the influence of Foch," Poincaré reported, "Joffre changed his mind. Foch has acquired a certain ascendancy over French, he has established a constant liaison between the two armies and this liaison is assured by General Wilson who, of all the English, best understands French ideas."[77]

---

[72] See Guinn, British Strategy and Politics, pp. 89-92.

[73] T George Pratt (Acton Town Council) to Winston S. Churchill, 17 September 1914; Winston S. Churchill, message, 17 September 1914, Gilbert, Churchill, III, Companion, I, 122-23. That portion of the message, however, was not sent in the final communication. (Ibid., n. 1, p. 123.)

[74] Guinn, British Strategy and Politics, pp. 48-49ff.

[75] Poincaré Papers, XXXVII, BN, NAF (16028), "Notes Journalières," entry of November 2, 1914, p. 145.

[76] Foch, Journées, AFF, p. 18.

Kitchener, moreover, failed to offer Wilson, the French favourite for the post, but instead proposed his old friend, Sir Ian Hamilton, little known to the French. As Foch indiscreetly revealed to Wilson a few days later:

> When Lord K. was at Dunkirk on Nov. 1, he proposed to Joffre, the President (and I think Millerand) to remove Sir John, & put in Johnnie [Sir Ian Hamilton.] Joffre at once said he would not agree. He said he had worked cordially & well with Sir J. & he wd. not agree to Hamilton. The President backed up Joffre with [the] result that K. & his blasted proposal were knocked out.[78]

"Under these circumstances," wrote Foch, "it was the opinion and the opposition of the Government and the French Command which very clearly saved the Marshal."[79]

There the question rested for the moment. Wilson, of course, was persona non grata with the British Government because of his involvement in the Irish affair, and not available for the post. If Hamilton's dismal performance at Suvla Bay in August 1915 may be taken as an indicator, moreover, the French did well in rejecting him, averting what might otherwise have indeed been a very unfortunate appointment.[80] But Foch's growing ascendancy over Sir John failed to provide the aggressive-mindedness desired by the French, who, according to Foch, "were perhaps little rewarded for their zeal [in defending Sir John] by the subsequent actions of the Marshal."[81] The extreme caution which still prevailed at British Headquarters from time to time, and which was attributed largely to Murray, remained as unacceptable as ever to the French. The final decision not to get rid of Sir John would thus have a sequel.[82]

---

[77] Poincaré Papers, XXXVII, BN, NAF (16028), "Notes Journalieres," entry of November 2, 1914, p. 145.

[78] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of November 5, 1914; cf. Joffre, Mémoires, I, 479, which reveals only that information given to Wilson and makes no mention of French initiative in the bid to get rid of Sir John.

The inconsistency of his having convoked Kitchener especially to discuss the replacement of Sir John--only to change his mind by the time of the conference--was not an act worthy of the later Marshal of France and certainly not in harmony with the principle of military solidarity between Allies he tried to demonstrate in his Mémoires, nor with the half-truth later told Sir John. (See below.) Joffre therefore remained silent on his own role in his Mémoires, preferring to put the blame for the whole incident on Kitchener, about whose reputation he was not equally solicitous.

Historians, basing their accounts on Wilson's diary and Joffre's Mémoires, neither of which gives the French role in the intrigue, have treated Kitchener's offer to replace Sir John with Hamilton as merely another episode in the Kitchener-Sir John French conflict. (See Liddell Hart, Foch, p. 149; Clark, The Donkeys, p. 33; Cassar, Kitchener, pp. 249-50; cf. Callwell, Wilson, I, 186-87.)

[79] Foch, Journées, AFF, p. 18.

In the meantime, Foch attempted to further obligate Sir John by indiscreetly telling him via Wilson on November 5 of Kitchener's proposal at Dunkirk to replace him with Hamilton. By making it appear that Joffre and the French Government had withstood Kitchener's machinations, but without disclosing French connivance in the matter,[83] Foch hoped that Sir John would feel indebted to the French for his post and thus be more pliable to French demands.

---

[80] Cf. Cruttwell, The Great War, pp. 217, 222-26, who tends to rehabilitate Hamilton's performance at Suvla Bay by blaming the disaster on the inactivity of subordinates.

The extent to which Joffre was familiar with Hamilton is not entirely clear. At the end of September, Wilson had suspicions that Kitchener wished to set up a separate command under him. Some assessment may have been made at that time.

[81] Foch, Journées, AFF, p. 18.

[82] See below, Chapter XII.

[83] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of November 5, 1914.

This ploy worked rather well, at least in the short run. When informed by Wilson of Kitchener's alleged attempt to sack him, Sir John "was upset" but thanked Wilson "warmly for telling him." After speaking further on the matter with Foch that evening, Wilson decided "it w[oul]d be a good thing for Sir J. to see Foch personally & thank him," and Sir John "quite approved."[84] The next day Sir John, in the company of Wilson, visited Cassel and "thanked Foch personally & in the warmest terms for his comradeship & loyalty." "They shook hands on it," Wilson reported, and, irony of ironies, "Sir J. told Foch he proposed to go & see Joffre and thank him also." "The two parted great friends," Wilson reported.[85] By these covert means, Sir John was brought into further subjection to the French.

Foch's half-truth disclosure, however, was very mischievous so far as Sir John's relationship with Kitchener was concerned. The fiery British Chief was indeed "much fussed about K's treachery, & sent" his ADC, Captain the Honourable Frederick Guest, to the Prime Minister immediately on November 6, "to know if he had the confidence of the gov't." "He also had Lord Guy Brooks & proposed to start a press campaign ag[ains]t K. by Gwynne," the editor of the *Morning Post*. "Poor Sir J.," Wilson lamented, "he will make a very strong case into an [invincible] one."[86]

---

[84] *Ibid.* Wilson's speculations to the contrary, (*Ibid.*), Kitchener, secretive by nature, apparently acted at Dunkirk without reference to the Cabinet. (See below.) Presumably, the Prime Minister would have been advised of any plan to remove the Commander-in-Chief, but Kitchener, who was very secretive, may have wished to have French support for the move before approaching the Cabinet, as Sir John had much support among the ministers, particularly Asquith and Churchill.

[85] Wilson Diaries, V, *IWM*, DS/Misc/80, ent[illegible] of November 5, 1914.

Kitchener, however, had apparently acted without Cabinet advice on the matter, for the Prime Minister was much taken aback by Guest's story, which he considered a fabrication, attributed to "that poisonous mischief-maker Gen. Wilson." "But it appears to have given great distress to Sir J. F. (who is very sensitive)," wrote Asquith, "& led him to think he had lost or was losing the confidence of the Government." Rather than further poison the Secretary of State's bad relationship with Sir John by discussing the matter with him, Asquith then attempted to resolve the misunderstanding privately. He thus wrote Sir John a "nice" letter discounting the rumour and assuring him of Government support and had Churchill do the same.[87] The "right hand" of the Government indeed knew little of what the "left hand" was doing.

Sir John's several démarches, however, may have in fact uncovered the truth. Much inflamed with subsequent French efforts to get rid of Murray, Sir John intimated knowledge of the Dunkirk intrigue to Kitchener in a letter of November 15. "Another great intrigue came to my knowledge a fortnight ago," he wrote on November 15, pinpointing the date of Kitchener's visit to Dunkirk, "but I must wait till we meet to tell you about that." "I can however trace the same underlying initiative and idea," he wrote, laying the blame on the French. "I am sure the French try to 'run cunning' sometimes and it is no doubt of help to them to have more of their own choices in responsible positions," he observed. "However au fond they are a low lot! and one always has to remember the class the French Generals mostly come from."[88] No novice at manipulation, Sir John was nonetheless offended in his sense of aristocracy by the intrigue of the French Command, to which Kitchener had become a willing and unwary accomplice. Needless to say, the whole episode very gravely damaged Sir John's relationship with both Kitchener and the French.

---

[86] Ibid., entry of November 8, 1914.

[87] Letter, Asquith to Venetia Stanley, 6 November 1914, in Gilbert, Churchill, III, Companion, I, 256; Cassar, Kitchener, p. 250.

Other matters, including the question of supplying guns and munitions to the British, had also been treated at the Dunkirk conference. Early in October, Lord Kitchener had offered the French, who were then faced with a serious munitions crisis, British matériel and munitions. In three months all French demands could be met, he had promised, to which the French had replied that British supplies would be needed beginning January 1, 1915.[89] By November 1, however, the situation had been reversed. On October 9, the British Cabinet, "while satisfied that adequate steps had been taken for the equipment of the 14 Divisions which will be ready for the field next January," were somewhat uneasy "as to the supply of guns, ammunitions, & other necessaries for the new armies which ought to be fit for active service in the spring & summer." "The supply of field guns" was a particular "cause for anxiety" and a "committee under Kitchener was formed to consider best steps to meet the needs."[90] The demands of the New Army for munitions and matériel as a result began to compete very considerably with those of the Force in the field.

---

[88] Personal letter marked "Secret" in French's hand, French to Kitchener, November 15, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/46. An alternate explanation may be that Sir John, by putting the blame on the French, was attempting to "draw out" Kitchener and get him to talk, or in any case, to let him know that he knew of the intrigue and of Kitchener's role in it.

[89] CT #1563/G, Minister of War to GQG, October 3, 1914, AFGG, I(II) A(I), no. 50.

[90] Letter, Asquith to the King, October 9, 1914, PRO, Cab 41 35/51 R/188.

At Dunkirk, Kitchener reported the very low munition reserves of the British Force: "currently 100 rounds per piece," recorded Poincaré, "but England only produces 20,000 rounds per week for about 480 pieces." Kitchener therefore asked the French for the loan of some guns and Millerand obligingly complied with the offer of 300 outdated but serviceable French 90 millimetre guns with 200 rounds of ammunition each.[91] Despite a much superior industrial capacity, Great Britain thus met her short term needs, pending fuller economic mobilization, by borrowing from the French. The French guns were only given back at the beginning of 1916.[92]

The day after the conference, in private conversation with the French politicians and Joffre, Foch echoed the competition of the two armies for the control of the Belgian Army and ultimately Belgium. "Foch, very eager . . ., thinks he will win against the Germans in Belgium," Poincaré reported, "but he very much distrusts the English. A number of their officers, he tells me, claim to make war only in order to keep Belgium."[93] In view of the prevailing climate of mistrust, it was no accident, therefore, that Foch had earlier made strenuous efforts to have the French IX Corps and not the British I Corps act next to the Belgians.

---

[91] Poincaré Papers, XXXVII, BN, NAF (16028), "Notes Journalières," entry of November 2, 1914, p. 145; Joffre, Mémoires, I, 44.

[92] See Joffre, Mémoires, I, 44.

[93] Poincaré Papers, XXXVII, BN, NAF (16028), "Notes Journalières," entry of November 2, 1914, p. 145.

The French ministerial tour of the north also included a visit to the Belgian King and Command at Furnes on November 2. Foch's brusque appeal to the Belgian King to hold the line on October 24 had apparently offended him.[94] For a short while thereafter, the Belgians bypassed Foch and communicated directly with Joffre. "The Belgians are sensitive and take counsel with difficulty, even when it is a question of lifting their morale," wrote Berthelot on October 28.[95]

Joffre thus took the occasion to promote better relations between Foch and King Albert. "Severe toward the Belgian Army," Joffre considered its commander, King Albert, a "poor man," "mediocre and weak" because of his discouragement and recent desire to retreat to St. Omer.[96] That, of course, was not a fair assessment. The visit of the French Ministers and Joffre to Furnes, nonetheless, was accompanied by all the niceties of diplomatic and military usage on both sides and resulted in the reinstatement of Foch "as delegate of the Commander-in-Chief to assure the coordination of operations between Belgian, English and French Armies in the north."[97] As in his dealings with the English, Joffre thus found that two lines of communication with the Belgians provided greater flexibility and indeed the opportunity for greater French control.

Joffre thus returned from the north "satisfied with what he saw and heard."[98] Well he might, for Foch was obtaining utmost participation from the BEF, and Kitchener, in response to the military crisis, had promised his New Army for the next summer. *GQG*, in fact, had already come to the conclusion that the decisive stage of the operation was over; that the enemy would soon break off the attack and might even be obliged to retreat to a more defensible line. That illusory expectation, sustained by Foch as late as November 5, was based on the hope of the Russian offensive on the Vistula diverting large German forces to the east.[99]

---

[94] Foch, Journées, AFF, pp. 9-14.

[95] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of 28 October 1914, p. 211.

[96] Poincaré Papers, XXXVII, BN, NAF (16028), "Notes Journalières," entry of October 30, 1914, p. 136.

[97] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of November 3, 1914, p. 218. See Poincaré, Au service, V, 413-16.

The Question of Reliefs, November 4-12, 1914

GQG's assessment of the general situation had a significant bearing on French attitudes toward relief of the British during the rest of the battle. Having loudly declared on November 1 at the dinner table that the German offensive could not go on for more than two or three days,[100] Joffre was not prepared, once the initial crisis had passed, to squander French forces, freed by the thinning of the line elsewhere, on relief of the "tired" British, whose calls for help were seriously resented. Assuming that the German drive on Calais had been frustrated but unable to mount an immediate counter-offensive, he wished rather to husband French forces for later offensive action.[101]

---

[98] Berthelot, *Diary*, I, entry of November 3, 1914, p. 218.

[99] Wilson Diaries, V, *IWM*, DS/Misc/80, entry of November 5, 1914; Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 482; Clive Diaries, II/I, *KCMA*, entry of November 3, 1914; *Letter*, Foch to Joffre, 5.11.14, *AG*, "Correspondance Foch (10 October 1914 - 21 January 1916)," 79; cf. Danilov, *La Russie*, pp. 316-17.

[100] Poincaré Papers, XXXVII, *BN*, NAF (16028), "Notes Journalières," entry of November 1, 1914, p. 143.

[101] Berthelot, *Diary*, I, entries of October 28, November 3, 4, 1914, pp. 211ff, 218-19.

The French Command was therefore surprised when the German offensive around Ypres resumed with great violence on November 5 and continued for another week. A new French Corps (XX) and a division (11) were sent as reinforcements, upon Foch's request, but he was instructed to use his forces sparingly and on November 9 was advised, with little regard for the situation on the battlefield, to gather his cavalry for transfer south.[102] Only on November 10, when Foch "let fall a word of weariness" and spoke of "breaking off the fight at any price" and the British again spoke of retreating, did GQG realize the seriousness of the situation. Thereupon the equivalent of three divisions were gathered up from small units in reserve from the armies all along the French line to be sent north as reinforcements.[103]

Sir John thus had little chance under these circumstances of persuading the French to take up more of his line. On October 4, returning to his demands of October 31, he again pressed Foch to take over the line of his weary I Corps,[104] but Foch, who had just been refused further reinforcements by GQG, was less generous than he might otherwise have been.[105] All he would promise was that forces would be earmarked for British support.[106] By that tactic, Foch calculated, the British would be kept fully engaged, but the danger of an enemy breakthrough averted.[107]

---

[102] Berthelot, Diary, I, entries of November 5-9, 1914, pp. 220-25.

[103] Ibid., entries of November 10, 11, 1914, pp. 226-28.

[104] Letter, French to Kitchener, October 31, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/36; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of November 4, 1914.

[105] Berthelot, Diary, I, entry of November 4, 1914, p. 319; Tel. message #614, Commander-in-Chief to Foch, November 3, 1914, AFGG, I(IV) A(IV), no. 3797; CT #724, Commander-in-Chief to Foch, November 4, 1914, 8:50 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(IV), no. 3860.

[106] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of November 4, 1914.

The British, however, were not satisfied. Having been refused the relief of his I Corps by Foch, Sir John sent a note to Joffre the next day urging "the necessity for re-collecting his forces, & having a shorter line." Both the 1st and 7th Divisions were down to the very low level of 6,000 men, Clive noted, but Sir John was not willing to send in reinforcements to bring them up to strength in men because of the lack of sufficient officers.[108]

The British demands had little impact on the French. In fact, the British were asked to assume a greater portion of the line during the ensuing combat. On November 7, French reinforcements were sent from D'Urbal's Army (DAB) to shore up the British I Corps, "a good deal pressed" about Hollebecke. At the same time, however, Foch requested that the British extend their right to the La Bassée canal in order to free four French battalions and three batteries required to prop up his hard-pressed XXXIII Corps of the Tenth Army. This request was rejected by Sir John, "as his troops," he said, were "already exhausted by holding a line too long for their strength."[109]

On November 10, the situation on the battlefield worsened. Foch, this time anxious for his IX Corps, asked for British cavalry (under Allenby) to relieve French cavalry (under Conneau), so the latter could shore up the IX Corps. Sir John first agreed, but a false report that St. Eloi had fallen and "Murray's constant crabbing of the French upset

---

[107] Alexandre, Avec Joffre, entry of November 5, 1914, p. 176.

[108] Clive Diaries, II/I, KCMA, entry of November 5, 1914.

[109] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entries of November 7, 8, 1914.

Sir John," who then reneged on his promise. Later, under Wilson's influence, he returned to his original position. "Murray's influence is v[ery] bad," noted Wilson,[110] foreshadowing a new crisis brewing at British Headquarters.

On November 11, the crisis broke. "This morning," wrote Wilson, "owing to pessimistic reports from Haig & owing to Murray's evil *influence*, Sir John was in *tantrums* with the French and threatened to retire."[111] Although Wilson managed to dissuade Sir John from retreating,[112] his anger toward Joffre for failing to provide adequate reinforcements was conveyed to *GQG*. "Sir John is anxious that our line should be shortened to 20 miles [and] says Gen.Joffre has no right to leave us so weak," wrote Clive, who happened to be on a mission to British Headquarters that day. "H[enry] W[ilson] tells me that if the Germans continue to attack and reinforce their troops, we must either shorten our line (by retiring) or be reinforced." "It is not so much a question of having no nerves," he added, "but our men are so tired."[113]

Faced with the possibility of British retreat, the French finally responded. "The British demand a rest," wrote Berthelot grudgingly on November 10, "although the English Army just received 21 fresh battalions and 19,000 additional men."[114] The equivalent of three French divisions were nonetheless gathered up by Joffre from his several armies as reinforcements. That no large units were immediately available would suggest that the French also were at the end of their strength. These reinforcements allayed immediate British fears,[115] until the battle ended on November 12.

---

[110] *Ibid.*, entry of November 11, 1914.

[111] *Ibid.*

[112] *Ibid.*

[113] Clive Diaries, II/I, *KCMA*, entry of November 10, 1914.

[114] Berthelot, *Diary*, I, entry of November 10, 1914, p. 226.

The question of shortening the British line nonetheless remained the subject of very acrid contention for some time to come,[116] foreshadowing one of the major sources of friction during the period of trench warfare. A new French intrigue to obtain more favourable British personnel further exacerbated Anglo-French military relations.[117] The exchange of decorations incident to King George V's visit to St. Omer on December 2 was thus essential.[118] Anglo-French military relations had become very rancid during the "Race to the Sea" and were now in need of a great deal of sweetening.

During the first Battle of Ypres, the British fought hard and bled much. Their losses reported at the time from the beginning of their advance on October 14 to the end of November were 52,000, bringing total British losses to 86,000 since the beginning of the campaign.[119] Those enormous losses, most of which were incurred at Ypres, spelled the end of the old professional Army. Essentially thereafter the British Army would consist of new forces, lacking the professionalism of the men who had gone to France in August, 1914.[120]

---

[115] Clive Diaries, II/I, KCMA, entry of November 11, 1914.

[116] See Ibid., entry of November 14, 1914, and below; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of November 13, 1914.

[117] See below, Chapter XII.

[118] See Foch, Mémoires, I, 253-54.

[119] HGW (1914), II, 466-67. Edmonds, working from internal data at a later date, put losses from October 14 to November 30 at 58,155. (Ibid., p. 466.)

In a general way, Joffre was satisfied with the British performance at Ypres. On November 13, as the Battle drew to a close, "he was plainly pleased with the stubbornness of the British and the French" in the north, Clive reported, and said that "he was 'happy.'"[121] His especial admiration was reserved for Foch, however, whom he credited with having obtained these favourable results from the British. Foch, he told Herbillon, "demonstrates absolute confidence and an equal tenacity," "galvanizes our troops and imposes [our will] on the English, who, moreover, show an admirable power of resistance."[122] He might have added that Foch had obtained this result only by reinforcing the British in crisis rather than by relieving their hard-pressed forces. Joffre's satisfaction at British performance, however, was not sufficient to prevent him from seeking further adjustments in the British Command in the meantime, which would provide for even greater British participation.

Foch, for his part, later praised the solidarity between commands which had allowed for the equivalent of 10 Allied Corps (cavalry excluded) to stand up to the equivalent of 14 German Corps. That, indeed, was a remarkable achievement for which he deserved most of the credit. His growing control over Sir John, however, was based not only on remarkable leadership and military solidarity but at least in part--to a greater extent than he and his apologists cared to admit--on subterfuge and intrigue.[123]

---

[120] Ibid., p. 465. Cf. Clark, The Donkeys, p. ii, who claims quite correctly that the old professional Army was "finally buried in 1915."

[121] Clive Diaries, II/I, KCMA, entry of November 13, 1914.

[122] Herbillon, Souvenirs, I, 70.

While praising the extreme tenacity of the British I Corps, Foch could not refrain, in his retrospective analysis, from refuting the view that the victory was essentially British. Of the 45 kilometres of the active front, the British, who held 25 kilometres on October 31, held only 15 by November 5, he wrote, and the French held the remaining 30 kilometres. That, of course, was an accurate report, but the forces engaged in the Ypres salient were more equally divided than he indicated, the French having engaged 4 army corps, two cavalry corps and two territorial divisions, while the British had engaged three corps (not two corps as he stated) and equivalent cavalry.[124] The fighting at Ypres, in fact, was more or less equal, the British bearing the brunt of the fighting initially with the French coming to the rescue at the end.

The Germans had been foiled in their drive on Calais, and their plan to beat the Allies before turning against the Russians had failed.[125] But the Allied victory was essentially negative, resulting in stalemate, for the Germans still remained in France and the lines had drawn up in a new kind of stationary positional warfare. To smash through these lines would be the burden of the next four years. Under the impact of crisis, however, the French now had acquired the assurance of a total military commitment from the British for the forthcoming struggle.

---

[123] See Weygand, Mémoires, I, 145-46, 184-85; Foch, Mémoires, I, 239-40.

[124] Foch, Mémoires, I, 253-54, 240-41, 168. He excluded the 7th Division of the IV Corps from his calculations, which, along with the Indian Division, equaled one more corps.

[125] Ibid., p. 245.

CHAPTER XII

EPILOGUE: THE END OF A PERIOD

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER, 1914

The Battle of Ypres marked the end of the "War of Movement" on the western front. During that battle, each side having failed to outflank the other in the so-called "Race to the Sea," manoeuvre in the field finally gave way to "entrenchments, barbed wire," and "bullets from automatic weapons," accompanied by unprecedented loss of life.[1] As the lines of trenches stabilized from the Alps to the North Sea in mid-November, the Allies gradually came to a realization that the short war of manoeuvre, for which all the belligerents had prepared, had resulted, not in victory, but in deadlock and that the war would be a long and costly war involving all the resources of the state. Adapting to the changed conditions of the war would thus be the major challenge of the next three and a half years, for the deadlock on the western front would not be broken, despite the increased size of attacks, until the German offensive in the spring of 1918.

The general situation, moreover, at least from the British point of view, was profoundly altered by events which occurred during the last two months of 1914. The entry of Turkey into the War at the beginning of November posed special problems to the British for the defence of

---

[1] [J. W.] Hackett, The Profession of Arms (London: Times Publishing Co., 1963), pp. 49-50; cf. Cruttwell, The Great War, pp. 106-09.

Egypt,[2] and made the quest for new Allies in the Balkans imperative.[3] The Battle of the Falklands on December 8, which resulted in the destruction of Admiral von Spee's "cruiser squadron," on the other hand, cleared the outer seas of German warships, giving the British full liberty of action for the use of British sea power to open secondary theatres outside of France. Although the Balkan situation was much more complicated than the British Government perceived, the Cabinet continued to hope to find some "territorial formula which would bring Bulgaria and Rumania into the fighting line alongside Serbia and Greece."[4] A military expedition there might well be decisive. On the other hand, the loss of Lodz by the Russians in early December indicated that the "Russian steamroller" had been brought to a halt while still in Russian Poland and led Kitchener to ponder the nature of future German strategy in France.[5] The last weeks of 1914 therefore marked a new period, characterized, not by the glorious return of the troops, but by readjustments in the political-military structure and, most important of all, the Allied quest for a strategy adapted to the changed conditions of the war.

Adjustments in the Political-Military Structure

Failure of the French Command to obtain decisive results during the "War of Movement" caused much surprise and disappointment to the citizens and Government of France. The French Cabinet, somewhat tarnished by its earlier hegira to Bordeaux, returned to the Capital on December 11. Faced with new problems of purchase and supply created by the advent of trench warfare and stalemate, the Government then assumed a more aggressive role in the administration of the war effort. By their plan in early January to send an army to Salonika in support of the Serbs, the Cabinet also challenged Joffre's exclusive control over French strategy. The result was a long and difficult political-military struggle between the "easterners" in the Cabinet and High Command, which would mark 1915 and much of the rest of the war.[6]

---

[2] See Hankey, The Supreme Command, I, 242-43; see Ulrich Trumpener, Germany and the Ottoman Empire, 1914-1918 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 21-60 for the circumstances surrounding Turkish entry into the war. The Turks had already closed the Straits in September, following the arrival of the Goeben and Breslau.

[3] C. J. Lowe and M. L. Dockrill, The Mirage of Power, Vol. II: British Foreign Policy 1914-22 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 185-86.

[4] Asquith, Memories and Reflections, II, 58 (entry of November 28, 1914); Lowe and Dockrill, Mirage of Power, II, 183-86; Guinn, British Strategy and Politics, p. 44.

[5] Guinn, British Strategy and Politics, p. 44.

The Parliament, too, many of whose members had just returned from the front, was in a testy mood. After a patriotic session on December 22, the Chamber, in view of the unhappy prospect of a long war, began to regret the vast powers conferred upon the Cabinet and Commander-in-Chief and to reassert its traditional role. As the "Victor of the Marne," of course, Joffre was still too popular to permit a direct attack on him. The Chamber had also agreed not to play into the hands of the enemy by direct interpellation. Discontent with the Government and High Command was therefore channeled into the Army Commissions of the Chamber and Senate. In early 1915, these two agencies reasserted their traditional right to inquire into the War Ministry's handling of supply and matériel. In the course of 1915, despite Millerand's attempt to thwart their activities and shield the High Command from "civilian interference," parliamentary inspection was extended to the army zone under Joffre's control. Although Joffre still enjoyed vast prestige and authority, the period of unchallenged "military dictatorship" had indeed drawn to a close, succeeded by a period of intense civil-military conflict in which the Chamber, in the absence of victories in the field, would ultimately acquire renewed authority over both Government and Command.[7]

---

[6] See King, Generals and Politicians, pp. 34-35, 41-42, 67-88ff; also Poincaré, Au service, VI, 18-19.

In Great Britain, the machinery of war-time government was also adjusted in order to develop new plans to meet the "new situation arising out of the growing stalemate on the western front and the intervention of Turkey as a belligerent."[8] A number of ill-coordinated diplomatic and military initiatives associated with Turkey's entry into the war convinced Asquith that the old cabinet system with its lack of systemized contact between services, lack of professional advice, and lack of overall direction was no longer adequate. He thus set up a special Cabinet Committee, the War Council, superseding the Committee of Imperial Defence in the overall direction of the war. The new body, concerned with the long term problems of British strategy rather than the day-to-day conduct of the war, consisted initially of Asquith, Kitchener, Churchill, Grey, Lloyd George, Wolfe-Murray, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Fisher, First Sea Lord, and Balfour, a prominent member of the Opposition, with the "indispensable" Hankey as Secretary.[9]

The War Council, however, which met for the first time on November 25, changed little in the British power structure. Kitchener and Churchill still remained dominant in the formulation of British strategy, and the service chiefs' advice, as witnessed by the Dardanelles fiasco, was not always solicited or accepted. The most portentous development was the growing interest of Lloyd George in military matters. Although the War Council, sometimes expanded to include the Commander of the BEF, provided an organ for the systematic formulation of policy, it proved largely ineffective due to its ever-increasing numbers, lack of authority (except as delegated by the Cabinet) and lack of regularized meetings and agenda. It nevertheless marked a first step toward a more effective conduct of the war at the Cabinet level, which ultimately culminated in the powerful War Cabinet under Lloyd George at the end of 1916.[10]

---

[7] For the events leading to a succession of weak ministries and Joffre's fall from power at the end of 1916, see King, Generals and Politicians, pp. 34-191.

[8] Hankey, The Supreme Command, I, 233.

[9] See Cassar, Kitchener, pp. 259-60; Hankey, The Supreme Command, I, 223-33, 237; K. G. Robbins, "Foreign Policy, Government Structure and Public Opinion," in British Foreign Policy under Sir Edward Grey, ed. by F. H. Hinsley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 533-34.

Readjustments in the Two Commands

Significant changes were also made in the personnel of the two Commands at the close of the phase of movement. Berthelot, the most effulgent of anglophobes, was dismissed as Assistant Chief of Staff on November 22 and given the command of a corps.[11] His removal from GQG represented a victory for Gamelin and the Third Bureau whose preference for a flank manoeuvre had repeatedly come into conflict with his strategy of frontal assault. The Third Bureau, having acquired the right to advise the Commander-in-Chief directly, had indeed demonstrated the value of its strategy on the Marne. Their opponent now became the subject of a *limogeage élégant*.[12]

---

[10] Guinn, British Strategy and Politics, pp. 34, 42; Hankey, The Supreme Command, I, 237-55; Cassar, Kitchener, pp. 259-60ff; Asquith, Memories and Reflections, II, 64-75ff. For a critique of the War Cabinet, see Taylor, English History, pp. 74-77.

[11] Berthelot, Diary, I, entries of November 16, 22, 24, 1914, pp. 232, 244-45. "Sidney Clive up & tells me Gen: Berthelot (the Fat Boy) has been 'dégommé'd,'" wrote Wilson, humourously. (Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of November 24, 1914.)

One of Berthelot's last official acts on November 17 was to vent his spleen on the British. In response to renewed requests for reliefs of an extra 1000 yards of trenches, he complained, echoing Foch's earlier criticism, that the British did not understand that "war is not played as a sport." They had failed to send the "numerous divisions ready" on British soil, he added. "Will we soon have to be on guard against them?"[13] The concept of perfidious Albion, expressed by La Panouse at the very outset of the war, was thus still very much alive in his mind. In effect, the prejudices and stereotypes which pervaded anti-British sentiment prior to the war had remained largely intact during the first three months of combat. Suspicion and mistrust of British intentions thus remained a major impediment to effective cooperation in the field.

Since the beginning of the campaign, Berthelot had played a significant role in militating against the British. He now had a new and more justifiable complaint, to which Cambon had earlier given voice during the Battle of the Marne. The British, in their press accounts, he complained, played up British and Belgian successes and downplayed the French contribution. "Bravo for the English, bravo for the Belgians; the French do not exist and no one speaks of them!" wrote Berthelot. A week earlier he had loudly complained along the same lines to Yarde Buller, the British Government's emissary at *GQG*.[14] Failure to receive due coverage in the British press was especially galling to the French, with their proud military tradition. But the situation was never fully corrected, with the result that many of the British at the end of the war would firmly believe "that the British Army" had "won the war in France."[15]

---

[12] Pichot-Duclos, *Réflexions*, pp. 189, 193; Gamelin, *Manoeuvre*, pp. 92-93, 62-66, 106-07, 181-84; Joffre, *Mémoires*, I, 239-40, 379-86.

[13] Berthelot, *Diary*, I, entry of November 17, 1914, p. 235; note from Field Marshal French to Foch, November 16, 1914, *AFGG*, II A(I), no. 132; #835, Foch to *GQG*, November 16, 1914, *AFGG*, II A(I), no. 131.

Under Berthelot's influence, *GQG* sternly lectured Foch on the inadvisability of giving the British satisfaction in their renewed demands for reliefs, while French reinforcements to the northern sector were temporarily withheld.[16] But even before Berthelot's dismissal, Joffre had begun to adopt a more conciliatory attitude toward the British and, contrary to the advice of his Assistant Chief, decided to give way on this minor point.[17] Berthelot's departure thus removed a serious irritant in command relations and paved the way for a somewhat more accommodating attitude at *GQG*. His replacement was General Pellé, who was known for his skill as a military diplomat. General Nudant, who succeeded Pellé as the other Assistant Chief of Staff, also "looked a first rate man" to Clive and respected the British Army for its defensive ability, but he, too, in common with others at *GQG*, had serious doubts about its offensive capacity, preferring to reserve that role for the French Army.[18]

---

[14] *Ibid.* "To read the British press which is diffused in the entire world," wrote Cambon to Foch on November 13, "it would seem that the British Army were the only one in the field." Cambon placed part of the blame for this situation on the reticence of the French Staff. (Letter, Cambon to Foch, November 13, 1914, *AFF*, File "Paul Cambon et F. Foch.") See Cambon's similar complaint to Delcassé, (Letter, Cambon to Delcassé, September 12, 1914, Delcassé Papers, *AE*, Vol. 3, #329-35).

[15] John C. Cairns, "A Nation of Shopkeepers in Search of a Suitable France, 1919-1940," *American Historical Review*, LXXIX (1974), 711.

[16] #3895, 3896, 4103, Joffre to Foch, November 17, 1914, *AFGG*, II A(I), nos. 138, 139, 142; Berthelot, *Diary*, I, entry of November 17, 1914, p. 235.

[17] Clive Diaries, II/I, *KCMA*, entry of November 18, 1914; Wilson Diaries, V, *IWM*, DS/Misc/80, entry of November 26, 1914. Clive put the lie on Joffre's protestations that no French forces were available by reminding him of his earlier promise of support to Foch. (For Clive's role, see Clive Diaries, II/I, *KCMA*, entries of October 31, November 5, 12-19, 1914.)

While the image of the British as slow, late and unaggressive had had a significant impact on Allied command relations during the "War of Movement," it would have an even greater impact during the long period of stalemate and trench warfare that followed. Regarding the British as unsuited for offensive action, the French would attempt to have them hold more and more of the trenches in order to free French forces for offensive action.[19] The British, however, were anxious to avoid the attrition of the trenches and were as avid as the French for the success of offensive actions. The allocation of the trenches would thus remain a basic issue throughout much of 1915 and 1916; exacerbated when the major battles were being planned, it would finally come to a head under Nivelle in the spring of 1917.[20]

. . .

---

[18] Clive Diaries, II/I, *KCMA*, entry of November 27, 1914; see *AFGG*, X(I), 5; cf. "Memorandum [of the 3rd Bureau] on the subject of relieving the VIIIth Army by the English Army," December 21, 1914, *AFGG*, II A(I), no. 426.

[19] See below, pp. 497-98.

[20] On the 1917 crisis, see Guinn, *British Strategy and Politics*, pp. 211-12; King, *Generals and Politicians*, pp. 143-44. For a sample of the conflict in 1915, see #6365, Letter, Joffre to French, February 19, 1915, *AFGG*, II A(II), no. 927; Memorandum OA613, French to Joffre, February 23, 1915, *AFGG*, II A(II), no. 979; CT #2395, Joffre to Foch, March 7, 1915, *AFGG*, III A(I), no. 16. Haig, *Private Papers*, pp. 129-34ff, points out similar difficulties prior to the Battle of the Somme.

The events leading to Murray's recall as Chief of the General Staff at British Headquarters were to prove a painful chapter in Anglo-French military relations, demonstrating the seemier side of the alliance. The affair, which occupied the attention of both governments and commands over a period of three and a half months, centred on Wilson's intrigue with both Sir John and the French for the post of his less than competent superior. The French Command, as shown by their earlier attempt to get rid of Sir John French, were convinced of the need for a more aggressive approach at British Headquarters. Having failed at Dunkirk in their bid to have Wilson take over as Commander-in-Chief, the French now attempted to have him at least installed as Chief of the General Staff in place of the unaggressive Murray, whom GQG had come to regard as the chief source of British caution and reserve.[21] The French Command thus gave full support to Wilson's quest for power and promotion.

Wilson, however, chose his timing rather badly. The failure of the French to provide reinforcements on November 11 for the hard-pressed British Force led Sir John French to threaten retreat from the line. But Wilson attributed Sir John's "tantrums with the French" to "Murray's evil influence" and "pessimistic reports from Haig."[22] Growing impatient with Sir John's failure to act on his promise of October 29 that Wilson should replace Murray, Wilson then took the occasion to reveal Sir John's former discontent with Murray to Foch.[23]

---

[21] Weygand described Murray as "negation made man." (Weygand, Mémoires, I, 303; cf. Joffre, Mémoires, I, 422.

[22] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of November 11, 1914.

[23] Cf. Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entries of October 28, 29, 1914, with Joffre's message to Millerand on November 11, cited below.

The French response was dramatic. Foch at once took the initiative to have Murray replaced by Wilson, and Joffre was only too willing to take up the cause. "I have asked the government to intervene with regard to the English Staff along the lines of your letter," he wrote to Foch on November 11.[24] The intrigue was rather transparent, however, for Joffre's note to Millerand disclosed confidences which only Wilson could have provided: "that Marshal French would be happy to get rid [of] General Murrey [sic]," but did "not dare make a move in that direction, having asked for him for the campaign." Joffre also alleged that French wished "to replace Murrey [sic] with Wilson," but did "not dare ask that either." "I have every reason to believe," he added, "that representation by Mr. Cambon to Mr. Asquith or Sir Arthur Nicolson [sic], as follow-up to the Dunkirk conversations," would obtain the desired result deemed "extremely desirable in the general interest." "General Murrey [sic]," he suggested, could be given a post in Britain for "the organization of new forces, which he could later command."[25]

Cambon, however, rather than deal with Asquith or Nicolson, who were not privy to Kitchener's earlier offer, instead spoke "confidentially with Lord Kitchener" on the subject. And Kitchener, not fooled by Wilson's intrigue, expressed his amazement that Sir John, who had already replaced "eight officers of which some [were] general officers that he had himself requested," would not have replaced Murray if he really wanted to." He thus promised to "inquire discreetly into the situation." "'I leave General [Marshal] French absolutely free,'" Kitchener added with some cant.[26] The Government, of course, had a vital interest in the appointment.

---

[24] CT #2345, Commander-in-Chief to Foch, November 11, 1914, 10:40 a.m., AFGG, I(IV) A(IV), no. 4177.

[25] CT #2283, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, "Office-Personal," "Confidential," November 11, 1914, 8:45 a.m., AE, Série "Guerre 1914-1918," I, no. 149. This message was communicated to Cambon in similar terms with but slight paraphrasing. (CT 655, Minister of Foreign Affairs to French Ambassador, London, November 12, 1914, 12:35 a.m., AE, Série "Guerre 1914-1918," I, no. 150.

Sir John, however, was not about to bow to French demands. When advised by Kitchener of the French démarche on November 13, he was "rather disturbed" by this "fresh evidence of some infernal intriguing," and denounced French interference in his Command. "Had I any reason to find fault with Murray, I should have told you at once," Sir John replied.[27] Wilson, in fact, had made a serious error, for on the question of French reliefs, which sparked the initial conflict with the French, Sir John was essentially on Murray's side. Sir John nonetheless could not bring himself to believe that Wilson had been back of the intrigue, but the French, he said, were prone to "run cunning" and would profit from the appointment of their "own choices in responsible positions." He thus castigated them most severely.[28]

The visit of King George V to the front on December 1, at which time he was ceremoniously received by Poincaré, Viviani and Joffre, was thus a welcome palliative to Allied relations. The next day, the King threw oil on troubled waters by handing out decorations to all of Foch's commanders, d'Urbal, Maud'huy, Conneau, Mitry, Grossetti and Maistre, Foch himself receiving a KCB (Knight Commander of the Order of Bath). Hurt feelings were thereby salved and a new sense of solidarity engendered at both the political and military levels of the coalition.[29]

---

[26] CT #1003, Cambon to Ministère des Affaires Etrangéres, received November 13, 1914, at 6:05, "Secret," Communicated to War [Ministry], 14/11, AE, Série "Guerre 1914-1918," I, no. 154.

[27] Personal letter marked "Secret" in Sir John's hand, to Kitchener, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/46.
Sir John admitted that Murray had been sent to London on a short trip previously because he "was overstressed and overworked," but claimed he "had been perfectly well since" and that "perfect confidence and understanding exists between us now." (Ibid.)

[28] Ibid.; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of November 12, 1914.

The incident which brought the question of Murray's replacement to the fore again was the futile Anglo-French offensive about Ypres between December 14 and 20, for which Murray became the French scapegoat. The attack "miscarried" principally because of bad coordination and a half-hearted effort on both sides.[30] But Wilson, in predictable fashion, placed the entire blame for the failure on Murray. Criticizing Murray's orders on the 15th, Wilson urged Sir John to take full command himself of the operation.[31] When the attack failed on the 16th, Wilson had another long talk about Murray with Sir John. "He is clear in his mind," Wilson recorded, "that he must get rid of Murray & he suggests giving him a corps," stating that "he w[oul]d rather resign than take anyone" other than Wilson as CGS.[32] Sir John thus sent his personal secretary, William Lambton, to London on December 17 to discuss this "very confidential subject" with Kitchener and, recognizing the Government's interest in the matter, promised to defer any action until Kitchener's views were known.[33] Murray, in Sir John's scheme of things, would be given command of a corps when the BEF was reorganized into two armies.[34]

---

[29] Poincaré Papers, XXXVII, BN, NAF (16028), "Notes Journalières," entry of December 1, 1914, pp. 197-98; Foch, Journées, AFF, entry of December 2, 1914; Foch, Mémoires, I, 254-55; CT, Bertie to Grey, December 13, 1914, Grey Papers, PRO, FO/800/55A/269.

[30] Letter, Foch to Joffre, 14.12.14, AG, "Correspondance Foch 10 October 1914 - 21 January 1916)," #16; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entries of December 11, 16, 1914.

[31] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of December 15,1914.

[32] Ibid., entry of December 16, 1914.

While the proposed army reorganization was acceptable to the Government, Wilson's elevation was not. Kitchener, Lambton reported, was hostile to the appointment, but might give in. Asquith, on the other hand, requested Sir John to return home at once, which he did on December 20, for a discussion of the matter. At Walmer Castle, both Kitchener and Asquith spoke out against Wilson's appointment. "The Govt. & K. were very hostile to me," Wilson learned from Sir John. "They said my appointment would be very repugnant to the Cabinet & would shake confidence in the Army! That I was the principal cause of all the Ulster troubles & was therefore dangerous."[35] Sir John was thus persuaded to retain Murray in his post.[36] To prevent further quarrelling, however, Murray was asked to leave the staff mess and "keep rather aloof from the Staff as behooved his position as the Chief of Staff." The incident seemed to have anchored Murray all the more firmly to his post.[37]

---

[33] Letter, French to Kitchener, 17 December 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/57.

[34] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entries of December 17, 18, 1914.

[35] Ibid., entry of December 24, 1914; also December 19, 1914; Asquith, Memories and Reflections, II, 60 (diary entry of December 20, [1914]); "I put some pressure on Sir John French to retain Murray (when he was at Walmer) or at any rate not to substitute Wilson for him. I fancy you spoke to him in the same sense," wrote Asquith to Kitchener on December 28. (Letter, Asquith to Kitchener, December 28, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/76 WR/8.)

[36] Asquith, Memories and Reflections, II, 60 (diary entry of December 20, [1914]).

[37] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of December 24,

Meantime, the French Command grew increasingly irate at British performance in the Flanders offensive. Foch, for example, in a letter to Joffre on December 16, spoke of a "despairing reserve" in British attacks. Joffre sharply inquired why the British had not attacked in concert with the French on December 15 and 16 as planned, and further indicated his intention to take up the matter with either Sir John or the British Government.[38] The "resistance" of "certain subordinates" (an obvious reference to Murray) was the cause of the difficulty, Foch reported.[39] On December 21, however, he advised his Chief, on information obviously leaked by Wilson, that Sir John himself had left for London to ask for Murray's recall.[40]

But "Papa Joffre" was not deterred, despite the fact that Wilson, under increased pressure from Foch, managed to get an attack of three British corps into orders (though the result was but a demonstration) before the overall offensive was abandoned on December 20. (The difficulty posed by mud and bad weather had by then impressed itself even on the French Command, and the offensive was adjourned until the next spring.)[41] Desirous of resolving the question once and for all,

---

1914; see Letter, French to Kitchener, December 24, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/58.

[38] Letter, Foch to Joffre, 16.12.14, AG, "Correspondance Foch (10 October 1914 - 21 January 1916)," #15; CT #4044, Joffre to Foch, December 16, 1914, AFGG, II A(I), no. 366.

[39] CT #182, Foch to Joffre, December 17, 1914, AFGG, II A(I), no. 379; cf. TC 3857, Huguet to Joffre, December 16, 1914, AFGG, II A(I), no. 367.

[40] Letter, Foch to Joffre, 21.12.14, AG, "Correspondance Foch (10 October 1914 - 21 January 1916)," #18.

[41] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of December 17, 1914; Letter, Foch to Joffre, 19.12.14, AG, "Correspondance Foch (10 October 1914 - 21 January 1916)," #17 (reproduced in AFGG, II A(I), no. 4071); #4834, Joffre to Foch, December 19, 1914, AG, 16N1905, "Ordres et in-

Joffre had little regard for military or political niceties or even considerations of constitutionality, but cared only for fighting the war. Convinced that Murray's recall would make for greater British participation, he was prepared to seek his replacement, whatever the political implications.

Thus, on December 26, when Cambon returned to Paris to urge on Joffre the British proposal that the BEF assume the "extreme left and take the offensive along the coast," Joffre made his case perfectly clear. He "has no objection in principle" to the plan, wrote Asquith, "but feels that some time ago he did not receive the support he expected from British troops in carrying out an enveloping movement."[42] The reference was obviously to the earlier failure to march on Lille. This lack of British support Joffre now attributed not to "any unwillingness on the part of Sir John French but [to] want of energy on the part of his Chief of Staff, Sir Archibald Murray." Murray thus became the scapegoat in the place of Sir John. "Joffre has no confidence in him," Cambon explained, "and feels that so long as he remains Chief of Staff, there will be no proper cooperation between British and French forces."[43] But should the rumour of Wilson's prospective appointment in his place be true, added Cambon quickly, the result would be quite acceptable to

---

structions relatifs aux opérations," dos. 24, doc. 2156, (in AFGG, II A(I), no. 406).

[42] Asquith, Memories and Reflections, II, 61 (diary entry of December 28, [1914]). Letter, Bertie to Grey, December 26, 1914, Bertie Papers, PRO, WO/800/166 #108; Letter, Bertie to Grey, December 27, 1914, Grey Papers, PRO, FO/800/55A/289-94.

[43] Letter, Bertie to Grey, December 26, 1914, Bertie Papers, PRO, WO/800/166 #108; Letter, Bertie to Grey, December 27, 1914, Grey Papers, PRO, FO/800/55A/289-94; Asquith, Memories and Reflections, II, 61 (diary entry of December 28, [1914]).

the French.[44] Joffre thus gave his full support to Wilson's intrigue for personal advancement.

Asquith, however, correctly attributed the French request to "constant intriguing in certain quarters" and was "quite determined that it shall not succeed."[45] "But it becomes a serious matter if Murray has lost Joffre's confidence," Asquith wrote to Kitchener on December 28.[46] Kitchener, with Asquith's approval, therefore responded to the French complaint with the positive suggestion carried by Lambton to Sir John that the QM, Sir William Robertson (Kitchener's personal choice), be appointed in Murray's stead, as Wilson was totally unacceptable to Asquith.[47] This, of course, put the lie on Kitchener's refrain, oft repeated to Cambon and even the King, that he was leaving Sir John free to choose whomever he liked for senior posts.[48]

When advised of the French démarche, however, Sir John again became "very angry" at renewed French interference in his command.[49] French unhappiness with Murray he attributed to Murray's criticism of the French for having left the British in the lurch at Mons and during the Retreat which, he said, was the real reason they "have determined to have his blood." He was thus unprepared to give satisfaction, whatever the particular merits of the case. "I wish to keep him [Murray] where he is & I hope you'll support me," he wrote Kitchener.[50] If the British Government was prepared to countenance French intervention, Sir John, on the question of principle, frankly was not. Wilson, however, continued to press for Murray's replacement, telling Sir John on December 30 that Murray "was considered useless & harmful by the Staff here, by the Staff in Commands & by the French." He also attempted to deflect Sir John's irritation with the French to the Government by telling him that he should "not be angry with the French" for their involvement, but must "beat Asquith on the question of principle" by offering Wilson the appointment, which he would then refuse.[51] Wilson's agitation was thus most unsettling.

---

[44] Letter, Bertie to Grey, December 26, 1914, Bertie Papers, PRO, WO/800/166 #108; Letter, Bertie to Grey, December 27, 1914, Grey Papers, PRO, FO/800/55A/289-94.

[45] Asquith, Memories and Reflections, II, 61 (diary entry of December 28, [1914]).

[46] Letter, Asquith to Kitchener, December 28, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/76 WR/8; cf. Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of December 30, 1914, in which Wilson reported Sir John's observation "that K & Asquith were angry" with the French.

[47] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entries of December 29, 1914; Letter, Cambon to Kitchener, 30th Decbr., 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49; See Asquith, Memories and Reflections, II, 61.

[48] Letter, Bertie to Grey, December 26, 1914, Bertie Papers, PRO, WO/800/166 #108; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of December 28, 1914.

[49] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of December 29,1914.

In the meantime, the French Command, which had thrived on the rumour in circulation since December 22 that Wilson was about to replace Murray,[52] renewed their demand after being informed by Huguet on December

---

[50] Letter, French to Kitchener, December 29, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/61.

[51] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of December 30, 1914.

[52] Rumours had been rife since Sir John's trip to London on December 21-23 that Wilson was to replace Murray, and Wilson ironically had received congratulations from none other than Sir Earl Grey on December 23, while his appointment was still being considered. (Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of December 23, 1914.) Bertie, having learned from Lambton on their return trip from London, on December 22, that Wilson's appointment was in the wind, shared the rumour with Cambon, who passed it on to other French figures. (CT, Delcassé to Millerand, December 27, 1914, AE, Série "Guerre 1914-1918," no. 534; Letter, Bertie to Grey, December 26, 1914, Bertie Papers, PRO, WO/800/166 #108.)

27 of the true situation. According to Huguet, Delcassé, who was present with Joffre and Huguet when the matter was discussed, said it was "intolerable" that Wilson should be "ruled out for political reasons" and that he "would see Bertie at once & if this interview was not satisfactory, he would go over and see Asquith."[53] On December 31, Delcasse thus pressed the matter again during his trip to London. "The French are very keen to get rid of [Murray] as chief of the Staff," wrote Asquith. "They do not have any specific charge against him," he noted, "except that he speaks poor French and is not sympathetic." "Both K. and I think that Robertson is the right man to succeed him," wrote Asquith. "Winston is for Haig, but it would be almost impossible to replace him where he is."[54] Sir John's retrenchment in the face of French interference, however, gave the Government the perfect answer to French demands. "Marshal French would oppose any replacement of General Murray decided by Kitchener" came the word down the diplomatic channel to Joffre on January 5, 1915, the last word on the several diplomatic *démarches*, including a new chat between Kitchener and Cambon.[55]

The atmosphere of rumour and counter-rumour which further embroiled these sensitive communications led Joffre to inquire of Foch as to the truth of this latter information. Foch responded with a very unflattering picture of Sir John. Accurately informed by Wilson, Foch put Sir John's resistance in its general context. "In sum, it is the case of a weakling who shouts for help in distress," Foch reported, but "resents when you help him, saying you are meddling in his business."[56] Neither Kitchener nor Asquith "would hear at any price of Wilson" replacing Murray, he reported, but the limited powers given to Murray and Sir John's confidence in Wilson provided a situation at least partially acceptable to the French. The question moreover had seriously agitated Sir John, whose constant refrain had now become "Let them mind their own business and let me mind mine." French interest therefore would be best served, Foch advised, by letting the matter drop.[57] The whole question had indeed become a very touchy issue in Anglo-French military relations.

---

[53] Wilson Diaries, V, *IWM*, DS/Misc/80, entries of December 27, 28, 1914; cf. Letter, Bertie to Grey, 28 December, 1914, *PRO*, Grey Papers, FO/800/55A/302-03.

[54] Asquith, *Memories and Reflections*, II, 65 (diary entry of December 31, [1914]). On December 28, 1914, Churchill wrote Sir John French recommending Haig for the post. (Letter, Churchill to French, 28 December, 1914, in Gilbert, *Churchill*, III, *Companion*, I, 335.

[55] CT #1146, Joffre to Foch, January 5, 1915, 9:30 a.m., *AG*, 16N1676, "Ordres et instructions relatifs aux operations," dos. #25, doc. #2259.

Joffre decided to follow Foch's advice. "Although Murray seems to have consolidated his position, "he has lost all influence," wrote Joffre to Millerand, "which is the most important thing for us, and things may remain as they are for the moment," he observed, "because we cannot obtain more."[58] The final phrase, "because we cannot obtain more," added to the minute in Joffre's hand, revealed the substance of his policy toward the British. From the outset, his aim had been to obtain maximum participation in the field from the British Allies. In this, he had the full support of the French Government, whose consistent long term policy since the defeat of 1871 had been to seek security through the effective application of alliances. That the approach of personnel adjustment had not worked in getting a more energetic stance from the British Command did not mean that Joffre had abandoned the goal. It merely meant that, after so much agitation on the subject, some other tack would be tried. The French Command would thus press in early March and at the end of July, 1915, for a unified command to assure full cooperation between Allied forces on the western front.[59] At the same time Joffre attempted in early July, by means of the first of a series of Allied conferences, to obtain a greater effort from the British in a new attack on the western front.[60] While Joffre might change his tactic from time to time, he never lost sight of his goal.

---

[56] CT #8867, Foch to Staff, Chantilly, 5/1/1915, at 3:10 p.m., AG, 16N1905, #2.

[57] Letter, Foch to Joffre, 5.1.15, AG, "Correspondance Foch (10 October 1914 - 21 January 1916)," #25.

[58] Letter, CT #1466, Commander-in-Chief to War, January 6, 1915, AG, 16N1676, "Ordres et instructions relatifs aux opérations," dos. #25, doc. #2283 bis.

The French Government, nonetheless, persisted, the matter of Murray's recall having become a diplomatic question and not resolved. On January 22, 1915, Millerand on his trip to London again discussed the matter with Kitchener. The British Government, Grey confided to Clive on January 21, prior to Millerand's visit, "were quite ready to accede to the wishes of the French, if a suitable man could be found."[61] In Millerand's presence, Kitchener assessed the possibilities. Wilson he considered "dangerous and impulsive," having had him on his Staff in South Africa. Admitting that Murray was "too slow" and therefore not acceptable, he went on to extoll the merits of General Douglas Haig, who had now also become a candidate for the post.[62]

---

[59] See Letter, Millerand to Kitchener, 2/3-1915, Millerand Papers, BN, Ctn 20; 15682, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, July 30, 1915, Fond Buat, AG, 6N7, dos: Correspondance relative à la nouvelle formule de commandement des forces alliée sur le front occidental.

[60] See Wilson Diaries, VI, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of July 7, 1915.

[61] Clive Diaries, II/I, KCMA, entry of January 21, 1914.

Sir John, however, was now ready to act, having reasserted his independence of the French by refusing Murray's recall, and his partial independence of Kitchener by delaying the appointment of his candidate, Robertson. An influenza epidemic, which affected several members of his Staff on January 20, provided the perfect excuse.[63] On January 24, Sir John proposed Murray's replacement by Sir William Robertson as Chief of the General Staff and cited Murray's health, which would limit his effectiveness for a month, as the reason for his recall.[64] Kitchener and Asquith, of course, immediately telegraphed their approval. Robertson assumed the functions of office on January 26.[65]

The events leading to the appointment illustrated all the difficulties of senior military appointments within a coalition. The British Government, because of the need to cooperate with the French, apparently felt some need to give the French satisfaction with regard to Murray's recall, but were not prepared to accede to Wilson's intrigue for advancement. As second in command, the Chief of Staff held much power and influence and therefore had to be politically acceptable. Wilson had too many political liabilities: he was therefore turned down despite repeated French representation on his behalf. Wilson was thus unable to turn to his advantage the fertile opportunities for intrigue offered by the diffusion of power within a coalition.

---

[62] Millerand's handwritten account of his trip to London, 22/1/15, BN, Millerand Papers, Carton 20. On January 10, 1915, Asquith noted in his diary that he thought both Kitchener and Churchill "agree to advise French to take Haig in place of Murray." (Asquith, Memories and Reflections, II, 65.

[63] Letter, French to Kitchener, 23 January, 1915, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/50 WA/70; Letter, Lambton to Kitchener, January 25, 1915, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/50 WA/71.

[64] Letter, French to Kitchener, January 25, 1915, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/50 WA/72. Nine months later, however, when Kitchener inquired about the possibility of Murray's assuming a command in France, as Sir John had advised for a later date, Sir John was again of the opinion that "his health would not stand the strain." (Letter, Murray to Kitchener, July 12, 1915, Letter, Kitchener to French, 14 September, 1915, Letter, French to Kitchener, September 14, 1915, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/50 WA/10, 123, 126; cf. French, 1914, p. 108, who cites the breakdown of Murray's health as the sole reason for his recall.

[65] Asquith, Memories and Reflections, II, 69 (diary entry of January 26, [1915]); Haig, Private Papers, entry of January 26, [1915], p. 85.

The matter, moreover, was not only one of Allied relations, but civil-military relations as well. While rejecting Wilson, Sir John's favourite, the Government was not prepared to impose their choice of Robertson on him at once but, on the other hand, gave him very little leeway to choose anyone else. Haig was finally suggested as an alternative. Sir John thus made his own decision but within very narrow limits of discretion.

Joffre's attempt to obtain a more aggressive-minded British Command, beginning with his earlier request for Sir John's recall, thus met with partial success. According to Joffre's postwar statements, the recall of Murray was a great "relief" to the French Command.[66] Robertson, moreover, in French eyes, was a "good choice in default of Wilson."[67] But Wilson, "returning from a five-day tour round the French positions," was surprised to learn that he had not only failed in his bid for CGS but had been replaced as Sub-Chief by Brigadier General E. M. Percival.[68] Wilson's new position as Chief Liaison Officer with the French, contrary to Foch's expectation,[69] moreover, drastically reduced his power and influence. In effect, Robertson, who had the full confidence of the Generals in the field,[70] shut him out of power, denying him access to important documents, some of which were even sent to the French without his knowledge.[71] If Wilson sought power by intrigue, Robertson effectively wielded it through military competence and single-minded toughness, as the Cabinet would find out a year later when he became Chief of the Imperial General Staff.[72]

---

[66] Joffre, Mémoires, I, 422.

[67] Letter, Foch to Joffre, le 26.1.15, "Correspondance Foch (10 October 1914-21 January 1916)," AG, #30.

[68] Haig, Private Papers, entry of January 31, [1915], p. 85; HGW (1915), I, 363. Clark, The Donkeys, p. 31, erroneously claims that Wilson retained his position as Sub-Chief of the General Staff.

Wilson's reduced position as Chief Liaison Officer, moreover, put him into conflict with Clive, upon whose liaison roles his new function encroached.[73] Promotion to the rank of Lieutenant-General thus proved to be cold comfort to the aspiring Sub-Chief,[74] whose great agitation had indeed come to naught.

A new era had come in command relations. Though Sir John preferred Wilson socially and slighted the working-class Robertson, whom he even excluded from his mess, Robertson, that tough practitioner of the military art, made no secret of his intent to exercise the full prerogatives of his office and, despite some attempt to assert his independence of the new Chief of Staff, Sir John found himself generally unable to resist his advice.[75] The vacillations of the British Command, divided between the tendencies of Murray and Wilson during the "War of Movement," thus came to an end as a result of the aggressiveness and toughness of the new man behind the throne. But Robertson was a devoted "westerner" and an advocate of offensive action. The advent of siege warfare thus played a miserable trick on the new unity of purpose, resulting in needless heavy losses.

---

[69] Letter, Foch to Joffre, le 26.1.15, AG, "Correspondance Foch (10 October 1914 - 21 January 1916)," 730.

[70] Haig, Private Papers, entry of January 26, [1915], p. 85.

[71] See Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of February 20, 21, 1915; Clark, The Donkeys, p. 32.

[72] See Harvey A. DeWeerd, "Churchill, Lloyd George, Clemenceau: The Emergence of the Civilians," in The Makers of Modern Strategy, ed. by Edward Mead Earle, pp. 298-99.

[73] Clive Diaries, II/I, KCMA, entries of January 31, February 8, 1915.

[74] See Clark, The Donkeys, p. 31.

Joffre, moreover, had apparently learned his lesson. While resorting to inter-Allied planning in July 1915 and pressing at the end of the month for unity of command on the western front as a means of obtaining greater British participation and greater control over the British Army, Joffre made no further attempt to influence the choice of appointments to the British Staff.[76]

Allied Strategic Response to the Changed Conditions of the War

The advent of trench warfare made little change in French strategy. Foch displayed some awareness of the new conditions immediately after the Battle of Ypres. "A large number of siege guns, with plenty of ammunition," would be required to "break down obstacles" opposed to them, he wrote to the Commander-in-Chief on November 19. "Our offensive has to be organized with a view to operations against fortified positions," he wrote, "—in other words, siege warfare on a large scale."[77]

---

[75] Ibid. See Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, 1915 passim.

[76] There is no hint in the documents of his having been involved in the events leading to Sir John's recall at the end of 1915.

[77] Letter, Foch to Joffre, 19.11.14, AG, "Correspondance Foch (10 October 1914 - 21 January 1916)," #11. For an English translation, see Foch, Memoirs, pp. 180-83. Foch expected the Germans to withdraw to a more defensible line.

However, he was still unshaken in his belief that "to make war is to attack."[78] The Germans, he argued, having been stalemated in the west, would withdraw troops in order to take the offensive in the east. He thus recommended renewed action in Flanders, an area where the trenches had not yet hardened, and which, because of their special interest there, would assure the participation of the Belgians and the British.[79]

On the question of German strategy, Foch was right. After the Battle of Ypres, Falkenhayn, in view of the growing deadlock, decided to transfer seven infantry divisions and one cavalry division fron the western front to the east in the hope of inflicting a crushing blow on the Russians in Poland. Although the German Command did not expect to knock the Russians out of the war, they hoped to win a victory "big enough to check the enemy for a long time." To make the diversion possible, the Germans decided "to act purely on the defensive" on the western front "with the most careful application of every technical device," further contributing to the growth of "trench warfare" "with all its horrors."[80]

Meantime, Joffre had begun to consider renewed attack ~~in view of~~ information received on German troop movements to the east, and as a result, on November 20, he instructed Foch to study the question.[81] Still unresponsive to the problems of trench warfare, Kitchener, moreover, began to press the French Command for an immediate attack to prevent further German troop movements to the eastern front.[82] Kitchener, in fact, had become alarmed as early as October 4 lest the Germans contain the Russians in the east, break through to the Channel coast, and "attempt to land German troops in England" itself.[83] A French attack in the west would divert German forces away from the Russians in the east.

---

[78] Weygand, *Mémoires*, I, 209.

[79] Letter, Foch to Joffre, 19.11.14, *AG*, "Correspondance Foch (10 October 1914 - 21 January 1916)," #11.

[80] Falkenhayn, *General Headquarters*, pp. 34-35; see Cruttwell, *The Great War*, pp. 79-92 for an account of the campaign in Poland.

[81] Berthelot, *Diary*, I, entries of November 20, 21, 22, 1914, pp. 238-39; T., Joffre to Foch, November 20, 1914, *AFGG*, II A(I), no. 167; CT., Foch to Joffre, November 20, 1914, *AFGG*, II A(I), no. 168.

Joffre, of course, fully agreed with Kitchener's plan. His whole strategy was dictated by the fact that the major part of the German Army was on French soil and only five days' march from the heart of France.[84] His one consistent aim was to drive the Germans out.

On December 1, while up in the north to meet the King, Joffre thus had long and informal talks on the strategic situation with Sir John French. "Joffre . . . expects to have a considerable quantity of heavy artillery available in a week or two," wrote Sir John to Kitchener, "and by that time we hope that German requirements in the Eastern theatre will have caused more withdrawals from our front in the West, and that we shall be thus enabled to batter down the enemy's trenches and make a vigourous advance."[85] On December 7, Foch presented the French plan to Sir John. A secondary British attack toward Warneton and Messines aimed merely at straightening the line would accompany similar French attacks north of Ypres. The French would launch the principal attacks in Artois and Champagne.[86] Here in essence was the French battle plan for 1915, but to be executed in the rain and mud of December. Except for the recognized need for more artillery, no readjustment had thus been made in French thinking in response to the advent of trench warfare.

---

[82] Letters, French to Kitchener, 1st and 3rd December, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/51-52.

[83] Kitchener to Grey for transmission to Buchanan, British Ambassador in Russia, October 4, 1914, cited in Keith E. Neilson, "Kitchener, Russia and British Strategy, 1914-1915," (unpublished paper courtesy of the author, 1979), p. 3. See above Chapter XI, for Kitchener's continued fear on November 1 of a German landing in Great Britain.

[84] Joffre, Mémoires, II, 1-2.

[85] Letters, French to Kitchener, 1st and 3rd December, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/51-52.

The British response was quite different. In mid-September, the "blue water" school, as earlier described, had begun to reassert itself because of the danger to the Channel ports. Especially concerned, after the loss of Antwerp, with the danger of enemy submarine bases on the Channel, Churchill, while on a visit to Headquarters on December 7-8 (and largely on his own initiative) pressed on Sir John the need to clear the Belgian coast by means of a combined military and naval attack. Unlike Wilson, whose sole concern was to match in step with the French, Sir John, demonstrating the traditional British concern for Antwerp, was easily convinced by the arguments of his old friend and agreed to support his plan for the BEF to take over the extreme left of the Allied line. Sir John would then cooperate with the fleet in an attack on Ostend and Zeebrugge and his cavalry could be given full scope for an advance along the Belgian coast.[87] The Government agreed with Churchill's plan. In the unanimous opinion of the British Government, came a message to Joffre on December 9, the most immediate and pressing strategic need is to free the vital Channel ports from German control and to remove the potential danger of German submarine bases just across the Channel.[88]

---

[86] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of December 7, 1914; cf. CT., 1530, Joffre to Foch, December 7, 1914, AFGG, II A(II), no. 266; AFGG, II, 243; Letter, Yarde Buller to Kitchener, December 10, 1914, Kitchener Office Papers, PRO, WO/159/9.

[87] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entries of December 6-8, 10, 1914; cf. Cassar, Kitchener, p. 261.

Sir John had already agreed to these strategic goals when, on December 8, Foch asked him to attack Messines and Warneton. Persuaded against his will by Wilson, Sir John expressed serious reservations which were not well received by Foch. "Comme il aime pleurer ce Bebe," [How this baby likes to cry] Foch told Wilson, who rightly concluded that "Sir J. is not out for fighting & heavy losses."[89] The reasons were entirely obvious under the circumstances.

Joffre's mid-December offensive to which Sir John's "hard-used little army" "contributed little more than a half hearted demonstration," failed to produce significant results.[90] The consequences of that failure were not immediately apparent, however. On December 22, the merits of moving to the far Allied left for an attack on the Belgian coast were still being pressed by Sir John, who met with Kitchener and Asquith at Walmer Castle.[91] Earlier Kitchener had been irritated by the whole plan which he rightly attributed to Churchill's meddling in military policy and which led to a considerable row between himself and the First Lord.[92] The great concern expressed by Kitchener at the meeting, however, in the wake of the Russian loss of Lodz, was that the Germans, after a successful offensive in the east, would turn back on the western front. The Russians, he had learned on December 18, were very short of munitions. That shortage he feared could "result in the Russians going on the defensive, the Germans taking Warsaw, and subsequently transferring large forces" for an offensive on the western front, in which case he had "no confidence" that the Allied line could be held.[93] Sir John, however, considered a German attack on the western front extremely unlikely. But to be adequately prepared, it was finally resolved that Sir John meet with Joffre to work out a suitable strategy for the western front.[94]

---

[88] CT #2128/g, Guerre to Joffre, December 9, 1914, AFGG, II A(I), no. 291. Joffre simply deferred discussion of the question until after the planned attack. (#2234, Joffre to Minister of War, December 10, 1914, AFGG, II A(I), no. 303.)

[89] Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of December 8, 1914.

[90] Guinn, British Strategy and Politics, p. 45. For an account of this operation, see HGW (1915), I, 13-22.

[91] Asquith, Memories and Reflections, II, 60 (diary entry of December 22, [1914]).

A week later, on December 27, Sir John met with Joffre at Chantilly. Although he considered the danger of a massive German assault on the western front "remote," Joffre claimed to have made adequate preparation for such an eventuality. His plan for the 1915 campaign season was a major two-pronged attack, one in Artois and one about Rheims. To procure the desired breakthrough, the December offensive and other small attacks yet to take place were designed "to draw the attention of the Germans from the main points of attack." The idea of Sir John taking up the extreme Allied left flank was agreed to in principle, but deferred. In the meantime, British forces would take over the portion of the line held by the French Eighth Army about Ypres "as fast as the successive reinforcements" would permit in order to allow the French to concentrate their forces for the decisive attack.[95] In French calculation, the British would play a "defensive role better adapted to their capacities" in the less decisive theatre north of the Lys.[96]

---

[92] Cassar, Kitchener, pp. 261-62; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of December 19, 1914.

[93] Neilson, "Kitchener, Russia, and British Strategy, 1914-1915," pp. 5-6.

[94] Asquith, Memories and Reflections, II, 63 (diary entry of December 27, [1914]).

The whole plan for 1915 thus appeared to have been amicably resolved along the lines of French offensive thought, with little consideration being given for the changed conditions on the front. Churchill's plan for a combined naval and military operation, moreover, had been conveniently deferred pending the major attacks projected by the French.

A basic strategic reevaluation then took place in Great Britain along the lines of the so-called "blue water" school of thought. The December offensive, with its loss of 5,000 men and no appreciable gain, was the event which apparently convinced leading members of the Cabinet that the war on the western front had come to a stalemate and that the French strategy of direct assault under conditions of trench warfare was futile.[97] The opportunities for striking on distant frontiers afforded by British seapower, unchallenged on the high seas after December 8, opened up new vistas for the employment of the new Army along the lines of "traditional" strategy. The entry of Turkey into the war and the diplomatic situation in the Balkans seemed to confirm the merit of deployment of British forces at some strategic point outside of France in order to obtain new Allies and perhaps, while defending Egypt from the Turks, renew communications through the Straits with Russia.[98] The basic concern which led to the Dardanelles expedition, in fact, was, as C. J. Lowe has so aptly pointed out, to "find some means of breaking the deadlock on the western front by employing British seapower" and "to knock out the weakest German ally, Turkey, and mop up all the Balkan neutrals by the sheer attraction of a dazzling success."[99]

---

[95] Letter, French to Kitchener, 28 December, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/49 WA/60; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entry of December 27, 1914; CT #6967, Joffre to Foch, 28 December 1914, AFGG, II A(I), no. 491. The extension of the BEF to the sea was dependent on a scheme to incorporate the Belgian Army into the BEF, which the Belgian King rejected. (Letter, French to Kitchener, 28th December, 1914, Kitchener Papers, PTO, 30 57/49 WA/60; Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entries of December 28, 31, 1914, January 2, 1915.) Sir John then asked for an additional 50 battalions from Kitchener, but these were rejected in the War Council of January 3, knocking out Sir John's hope of an offensive along the Belgian coast. (Wilson Diaries, V, IWM, DS/Misc/80, entries of January 2, 16, 1915.)

[96] "Memorandum [of the 3rd Bureau] relative to the relief of the VIIIth Army by the English Army," December 21, 1914, enclosed with #5499, Joffre to Foch, December 21, 1914, AFGG, II A(I), no. 426.

[97] See Memorandum, Churchill to Asquith, 29 December, 1914, in Gilbert, Churchill, III, Companion, I, 343; cf. Asquith, Memories and Reflections, II, 62-63 (diary entries of December 29, 31, [1914]).

On December 29, Churchill and Hankey laid their views before the Prime Minister in memoranda "written quite independently but coming by different roads to very similar conclusions." "Both think that the existing deadlock in West and East is likely to continue," wrote Asquith. Both agreed on the need for "finding a new theatre for our new Armies" rather than sending them to France, where, in Churchill's words, they will "chew barbed wire or be wasted in futile frontal assaults."[100] Taking up Fisher's old proposal, Churchill, who had earlier suggested a combined naval and military attack on Gallipoli,[101] now favoured taking the Island of Borkum and then invading Schleswig-Holstein. Hankey, who, in a farsighted memorandum, suggested the development of "a lot of new mechanical devices such as armed rollers to crush down barbed wire, bulletproof shields and armour," favoured sending the New Army to Turkey, and "in conjunction with the Balkan states clear the Turks out of Europe."[102] Lloyd George, who added his voice to this growing chorus in a memorandum on January 1, argued the case for expeditions to Syria and to Salonika to join the Serbs (much as members of the French Cabinet were advocating) in order to "knock the props out" from under the Central Powers.[103] "Profoundly dissatisfied with the immediate prospect—an enormous waste of life and money day after day with no appreciable progress," Asquith was indeed very sympathetic to these proposals.[104]

---

[98] See Cassar, *Kitchener*, 268; Guinn, *British Strategy and Politics*, pp. 44-45; Cruttwell, *The Great War*, pp. 32-33.

[99] Lowe and Dockrill, *Mirage of Power*, II, p. xii.

[100] Asquith, *Memories and Reflections*, II, 61-62 (diary entry of December 29, [1914]); see Lieutenant-Colonel Hankey, Memorandum, 28 December, 1914; Winston S. Churchill to H. H. Asquith, 29 December, 1914, in Gilbert, *Churchill*, III, *Companion*, I, 337-45.

[101] Cassar, *Kitchener*, p. 260.

Kitchener, moreover, although basing his entire strategy on the concept of a long war, was equally "baffled" by the "new kind of warfare which he did not understand." "I don't know what is to be done," he told Grey; "This isn't war."[105] On January 2, therefore, Kitchener addressed a letter to Sir John French in which he advanced the view that the chances of breaking the deadlock on the western front were very slight and suggested the study of other theatres for offensive action. He, for the immediate future, had no particular preference.[106]

---

[102] Asquith, Memories and Reflections, II, 62 (diary entry of December 29, [1914]).

[103] Ibid., p. 64 (diary entry of January 1, [1915]); David Lloyd George, Memorandum, 31 December, 1914, in Gilbert, Churchill, III, Companion, I, 350-56.

[104] Asquith, Memories and Reflections, II, 62, 64 (diary entries of December 29, 31, [1914], January 1, [1915]).

[105] Cassar, Kitchener, p. 268.

[106] Letter, Kitchener to French, 2.1.15, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30 57/50 WA/64.

Sir John was thus brought into the great debate between "easterners" and "westerners" which characterized 1915 and continued to the end of the war. The struggles within the War Council which resulted in the ill-fated naval bombardment of Gallipoli and later expedition are beyond the scope of this study. Suffice it to say that a new period in Allied relations had come, with all the problems in Allied Command relations associated with the diversion to other fronts of divisions originally promised to Sir John for relief of the French Eighth Army. In their quest for a suitable secondary theatre of war as a means of breaking the deadlock on the western front, the British and French Governments, moreover, would find themselves bitterly opposed by Joffre and the British Command in France, who saw no solution but to smash the German Army on the western front.[106] That conflict, in all its dimensions, would continue through the rest of the war.

---

[107] For Allied political-military relations in 1915, see George H. Cassar, *The French and the Dardanelles, A Study of Failure in the Conduct of War* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971); Cassar, *Kitchener*, pp. 266-330; King, *Generals and Politicians*, pp. 67-88; Guinn, *British Strategy and Politics*, pp. 48-118.

CHAPTER XIII

CONCLUSIONS

Although the French and British, as former enemies, were uneasy Allies in 1914, they enjoyed at least limited success in their attempt to work together and cooperate on the field of battle. By mid-November, when the "War of Movement" with its manoeuvre of mass armies on the open field had deteriorated into trench warfare and deadlock on the western front, many of the basic features of the wartime Alliance had been hammered out. The "War of Movement" with its close interaction between policy, strategy and tactics thus proved to be a formative period of the Anglo-French coalition.

French policy and military strategy during this period grew largely out of the prewar period when the British, in the absence of a political commitment, were viewed as valuable but uncertain potential Allies. Foch described French policy best when in 1910 he replied to Wilson's pregnant question: "What would you say was the smallest British military force that would be any practical assistance to you in the event of a contest such as we have been considering?" "One single private soldier," replied Foch without hesitation, "and we would take good care that he was killed."[1] French policy never varied. During the phase of movement, the major objective of Joffre, the French Commander-in-Chief, and the French Government was to obtain full British participation on the field of battle, for its own value, which loomed greater and greater as crisis followed crisis, and as a means of binding the British more closely to the French in a commitment to the continent.

---

[1] Callwell, Wilson, I, 28-29.

Entrusted at the outset by his Government with dictatorial powers for the conduct of the short war universally anticipated, Joffre thus pressed the British Government in mid-August, once they had decided for war, to maintain the forward concentration zone for the BEF in order to engage it in the first decisive battles. This he obtained from Kitchener, the British Secretary of State for War who exercised effective control of British strategy, despite his preference for an initially defensive stance.

Once the BEF was committed, Joffre, focussing largely on immediate operations, pursued the goal of obtaining maximum British participation with undeviating singlemindedness. Having obtained the forward deployment of the BEF from Kitchener, he urged Sir John on August 16 to hasten the forward movement of the BEF in order to coordinate with the offensive of the Fifth Army in the first great battles. On August 24, he sent two divisions to enclose the British left on the Aisne in order to give the French Command greater control of British movements. His visits to British Headquarters on August 26 and 29 and the Fifth Army's attack at Guise on the 29 were aimed at having the British hold the line after their setback at St. Quentin. Failing in that objective, Joffre turned to Poincaré and Millerand for political support. On September 3, he dismissed Lanrezac, whom he blamed quite rightly for much of the previous discord with the British, and counselled the new field commander, d'Esperey, and Gallieni, commanding the

Paris Army, to work closely with the British Command and provide all possible flank support. His trip to Melun on September 5 was to insure full British participation on the Marne. In Joffre's mind, the BEF, despite its smallness, had come to occupy a pivotal role: British participation would tip the scales in favour of victory or defeat.

The redeployment of the BEF from the Aisne to the vital northern theatre and the appointment of Foch on October 4 to coordinate the activities of the British, Belgian and French Armies in that area, were motivated by the desire to obtain a maximum rendement from the growing British Force. Joffre's request for Sir John's recall, as a result of the abortive march on Lille, and his later attempt to have Wilson replace Murray as Chief of the BEF's General Staff were likewise aimed at obtaining a more aggressive stance at British Headquarters. The French Command, in fact, proved very ingenious in the invention of means to draw the BEF into battle. The most effective of all was the tactic worked out by Foch of reinforcing British forces with French troops while refusing reliefs. This tactic he used to full effect during the Battle of Ypres, thereby assuring the most desperate of all British fighting during the phase of movement. He would apply this tactic in modified form in Artois in 1915 and on the Somme in 1916 by matching British attacks with adjoining French attacks in order to lead the British into battle.

French strategy during the "War of Movement," in fact, to a much greater extent than heretofore realized, was shaped around considerations of British participation. The initial French strategy of a diversionary attack in Lorraine to be followed by the decisive attack in the Ardennes and across the Sambre was framed to allow the British to arrive on time for the first great battles. After the failure of this strategy, Joffre's new plan for a counter-offensive on the Aisne assigned the British an essential role in holding the Allied left flank and delaying the German advance. Failure of the plan, moreover, was ascribed to premature British retreats. The French thus evaluated British performance largely in terms of their own strategic requirements. The decision to counter-attack on the Marne, rather than on the Seine as originally planned, was taken in response to the British offer on September 3 to march into the German flank. Tempted by the offer of even greater British participation, Joffre subsequently agreed to the British move from the Aisne to the decisive enveloping northern flank in the hope of liberating Lille. French strategic planning proved to be very flexible, indeed, when it became a question of obtaining effective British participation.

As prior to the war, nevertheless, the French assumed it their prerogative to draw up strategic plans and also to direct their day-to-day execution. Both the initial campaign plan, resulting in the "Battle of the Frontiers," and the Aisne plan were of purely French origin. The Marne plan likewise emanated from GQG, although the influence of Henry Wilson, the British Sub-Chief of Staff, in recommending the creation of an army on the French left on August 29 and his coordination with d'Esperey at Bray on September 4, reflected a minor tendency toward consultation if not partnership in the Alliance. The British, in fact, persuaded Joffre, against his better judgment, to redeploy the BEF on the Allied left flank near the Channel ports in October, but once the Force had redeployed, Foch reasserted French authority, and by means of strong, personal leadership, demonstration of military solidarity, and subterfuge, established almost complete control over operations on that flank. British acceptance of the French plan of attack for 1915, on the advice of Kitchener on December 27, signified that Joffre had indeed maintained his grasp on Allied strategic planning. He would maintain his position of leadership in the Alliance until the build-up of British forces in 1916 would put the coalition on a greater footing of equality.

Maximum British participation under French direction was in fact the French ideal. "If I could give orders to the British Army as I would to a French Army," wrote Joffre to Millerand just before the Battle of the Marne, "I would launch an immediate attack."[2] That statement summarized much of his thinking on the subject. Prewar staff talks, due to their very nature, had failed to bind the BEF to French direction. Kitchener, moreover, while instructing Sir John to cooperate at the outset, had emphasized that his was an independent command. The French Command thus resorted to a variety of measures, such as enclosing the BEF with French forces, the attempt to commit Sir John in advance to specific strategic goals, the appointment of Foch to supervise Allied cooperation in the North, and the attempt to have Wilson installed first as Commander-in-Chief of the BEF and then as Chief of Staff in order to secure greater French control over the BEF as well as assure greater British participation in the fighting. In 1915 Joffre attempted to accomplish the same ends by introducing inter-allied planning in July and requesting unity of command on the western front (under French leadership) for the autumn offensive.

---

[2] CT #3845, Commander-in-Chief to Minister of War, (Personal), September 5, 1914, 9:00 a.m., AG, 16N1905, GQG, EM, 3rd Bur., dos.: Comptes rendus au ministre[du] 29 août 1914 au 14 octobre 1914 (reproduced in AFGG, I(II) A(II), no. 2468.

. . .

The British entered the war, making a very limited commitment to the French. Kitchener in particular began his period of tenure at the War Office on August 6 by reducing initial British intervention to four instead of five infantry divisions and a cavalry division, opposing the forward deployment of the BEF and giving it firm instruction to avoid heavy losses while cooperating with the French. As crisis followed crisis, however, he displayed an attitude of increasing solidarity with the French.

The bases of Kitchener's strategic policy have long been the source of discussion. Part of the problem stems from the fact that he was very taciturn and secretive, providing few clues beyond a few laconic comments dropped here and there to his friends as to the bases of his strategic thoughts. His official papers deal with immediate situations and therefore leave a certain number of problems unanswered.[3] His acts, however, when coupled with the information gleaned from his comments and papers, provide some clues to his overall approach.

Kitchener, as shown, was very fearful as early as August 6, 1914, that the Germans might be able to effect a landing in Great Britain. Despite assurance from Churchill that the superiority of the Royal Navy would prevent any significant landing, Kitchener maintained that fear and indeed at Dunkirk on November 1 was very worried lest the Germans break through to the French Channel ports and launch an invasion of Great Britain. It is also clear from his prewar statements that he considered the French Army alone no match for the German Army and, unlike many of his contemporaries,[4] he also appears to have believed that the Russians alone were no match for the Germans either. This he demonstrated by his concern on October 3 that the Russians might be thrown on the defensive in the east, permitting the Germans to launch a decisive attack against the French which would result in French defeat.[5] As Asquith noted on December 22, 1914, it was a good thing "to have an optimist at the front" "provided you have also, as we have in K., a pessimist in the rear."[6]

---

[3] See Cassar, Kitchener, pp. 483ff.

Kitchener's pessimism on the relative strengths of France and Russia vis-à-vis the German Empire would thus account for his initial assessment at the beginning of the war--his great insight--that the war would be a long war and that the British would require an army of millions to win it. His pessimism vis-à-vis the French would also explain his actions during the "War of Movement." His game was really a waiting game until the New Armies were ready for action. In the meantime, it was essential that he sustain the French and Russians in order to prevent them from going under. He thus stepped forward to resolve the great crisis which threatened the dissolution of the Alliance at the end of August 1914 when, as a result of the repeated failure of French strategy, Sir John French lost confidence in the leadership of the French and the future of the campaign. In despair, Sir John decided to withdraw the BEF from the Allied fighting line, to retreat to Paris and then to his bases when that became necessary. The coalition held together uniquely because Kitchener, acting for the British Government, closed ranks with the French and, travelling to Paris on September 1, forced Sir John French to cooperate anew with the French.

---

[4] See P. Towle, "The European Balance of Power in 1914," Army Quarterly and Defence Journal, CIV (1974), 339-41.

[5] See Neilson, "Kitchener, Russia and Allied Strategy, 1914-1915," pp. 3-7.

[6] Asquith, Memories and Reflections, II, 60 (diary entry of December 22, [1914]).

Giving full expression to the attitude of solidarity which had led him to bow to Joffre's initial demand for the forward concentration of the BEF, he then sent all available forces as fast as they became available from the Empire and intervened when disputes arose between Joffre and Sir John to force a solution in Joffre's favour. That, of course, was most galling to Sir John. Finally, the Ypres crisis in November led him to commit the British fully to the French. To keep the French from giving way he promised them his entire New Army of 1,000,000 men for July 1, 1915. The French no longer had to wonder about the extent of British commitment.

With the advent of stalemate on the western front, the area of concern shifted from one of commitment to that of a strategy of diversions, which aroused French suspicions on ultimate British aims. But the commitment to the western front remained. Kitchener's promise of the New Army had been made on his own initiative; the prevailing circumstances in any case made it very difficult for him to divert major forces to secondary theatres in the course of 1915. Indeed, the need to support the French and through them the Russians, who were extremely hard-pressed by the German and Austrian offensives in 1915, meant that he would continue to authorize attacks on the western front in 1915 although his New Army was far from ready.

Kitchener's commitment to the French, however, was secondary to that of home defence. The French Army, in retreat, had not provided the first line of defence against German invasion. When, therefore, as a result of the failure of French strategy, the Channel ports were exposed to the danger of German attack in mid-September, he pressed for the redeployment of British forces nearer the Channel in defence of vital interests. When Antwerp was attacked on September 27, he insisted on an expedition for its relief despite the opposition of Joffre and the French Command. Wellington, too, had considered the Channel ports the most vital of British interests. Joffre's strategy of driving out the Germans by an attack on their outer flank, however, clashed with Kitchener's policy of defending the ports directly, leading to the most severe conflict yet experienced between the two. That the national aims of the two countries should lead them to clash on matters of strategy is not surprising.[7] The "blue water" school of strategy had only been temporarily driven underground as a result of the initial dispatch of the BEF. With the arrival of deadlock on the western front, powerful members of the Cabinet would revive its tenets and challenge the western front strategy of the two commands in the field. Civil-military conflict would thus become a way of life in 1915 and throughout the rest of the war.

The political-military power structures of the two countries also had a significant bearing on the operation of the military coalition. Relations within the coalition, in fact, proved to be very closely tied to the civil-military relations of the two belligerents. On the French side, Joffre received an unusual grant of authority from his Government, giving him control over French strategy and operations. The Government, whose political goals he was pursuing militarily, merely served as his advocate with the British. Joffre thus occupied a position of unusual authority, both in dealing with the British Government and the British Command. Once he became the "Victor of the Marne," moreover, his authority both at home and abroad was confirmed and enhanced.

---

[7] See Craig, Problems of Coalition Warfare, p. 2.

On the British side, power was likewise concentrated in Kitchener's hand, who enjoyed a prestige in public opinion similar to that of Joffre after the Marne. Although Kitchener exercised undisputed authority over the mobilization of men and resources within the Empire, his control of military strategy nonetheless had to be shared with the First Lord of the Admiralty within the Cabinet. Though he was unduly authoritative in his manner, Kitchener was unable to exercise effective control over the Commander-in-Chief of the BEF and was subject to the increasing demands of the field for reinforcements and the need to sustain the French Armies in the field, a need to which he was particularly sensitive. He thus exercised a less independent control of British strategy than did Joffre over French strategy.

Sir John French's authority as Commander of the BEF, on the other hand, was very narrowly circumscribed. Instructed to cooperate with the French, he was at the same time instructed to maintain an independent Command, to avoid endangering the Force, and to keep the Secretary of State informed of his plans and intentions. Finding these instructions and Kitchener's direction overly restrictive, Sir John appealed to members of the Cabinet against Kitchener's interference in his operations, to Joffre against Kitchener's establishment of a second command for the relief of Antwerp, and to Kitchener against Joffre's conduct of operations during the "Great Retreat" and his later attempts to get rid of Murray.

That the operation of a coalition should be attended by intrigue and exacerbations of political-military relations ought not to come as a surprise. In his study of the Military Alliance Against Napoleon, 1813-1814, Gordon Craig observed the same phenomenon.[8] Political control of the military establishment is difficult to maintain in wartime because of the need for professional military advice in the formulation and execution of grand strategy. Civilian control is even more difficult to maintain in a coalition. The need for two or more Allies to cooperate in the field diffuses the normal lines of authority, making it possible for the military leaders to line up against one or both of their governments.[9] The unique aspect of the Anglo-French coalition during the "War of Movement" was that the diffusion of authority on the British side, as opposed to its concentration in Joffre's hands, and the conflict between Sir John and Kitchener, who had developed a profound sense of solidarity with Joffre, allowed the French Commander-in-Chief to get his way in almost every instance. The most notable exception was his failure to have Wilson appointed Commander-in-Chief of the BEF, or at least its Chief of Staff.

Much of the uniqueness in Anglo-French inter-command relations during the "War of Movement" derived from the nature and personnel of each command and the personality and method of each commander-in-chief. Rejecting the idea of delegation to subordinates, Joffre commanded his armies in a personal, authoritarian manner; he also tended to treat the BEF as merely another Army under his command. Instructed both to cooperate with the French Army and yet maintain an independent command, Sir John alternated between enthusiasm for French strategic plans and resistance to French direction, depending on who had his ear at Headquarters, the cautious Murray or the reckless Wilson.

---

[8] Gordon Craig, Problems of Coalition Warfare: The Military Alliance Against Napoleon, 1813-1814 (Colorado: United States Air Force Academy, 1965), pp. 17-20.

[9] For a brief account of similar difficulties experienced in the operation of the Anglo-American coalition during World War II, see Samuel Eliot Morison, Strategy and Compromise: A Reappraisal of the Crucial Decisions Confronting the Allies in the Hazardous Years, 1940-1945 (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1958).

Much of his willingness to cooperate with the French at any given moment depended on the degree of his confidence in the most recent French plan, which in turn depended almost entirely on the existing or prospective situation on the battlefield. Sir John's willingness to advance to Mons on August 22 was based on confidence in the initial French plan of attack. French strategy, however, failed to provide against the wide German sweep across Belgium. After the retreat from the frontiers and his setback at St. Quentin on August 26, Sir John's confidence in French leadership simply evaporated. He then decided to drop out of the line and prepare his retreat, first to Paris, and then if necessary to his bases. Improvement in the military situation and Kitchener's tonic visit on September 1 partially restored his confidence and assured his participation in Joffre's Marne plan. Success on the Marne restored his confidence entirely and led to a short period of harmony and good will based on his voluntary subordination to the French Command. Frustration against entrenched enemy positions on the Aisne, however, led to renewed conflict. Only after the detrainment of his entire force in the north and the elaboration of French plans to drive the Germans out did his confidence return. He then engaged his Force in energetic and costly attacks in the First Battle of Ypres.

Mistrust, on the other hand, (as it always is), was a very great impediment to effective cooperation. The mutual distrust between Lanrezac and Sir John was a contributing factor in the breakdown in Allied relations during the "Great Retreat." The final blow came when Sir John came to believe that the French no longer intended to pursue an effective offensive. Within the British Command, Murray, the Chief of Staff, was continually mistrustful and suspicious of the French. The anglophobia and abiding mistrust of Berthelot, the Assistant Chief of Staff within the French Command, was a constant impediment to effective cooperation with the British. Joffre's reluctance to move the BEF from the Aisne to the outer flank was in fact based largely on French mistrust of the British and caused conflict for many weeks. On the other hand, the attitude of trust and solidarity evinced by d'Esperey and Gallieni were vital factors in the preparation of the Battle of the Marne. Likewise, Foch was able to obtain effective cooperation, in part, at least, because of his faith in the British and his application of the concept of military solidarity. His mistrust of their intentions with regard to Belgium, however, led to difficulty with Sir John on the deployment of his forces.

Personal relations, many of which had been established in the prewar period, also proved to be very important. Wilson, of course, who was a long term friend of the French, continually adjusted differences between the two commands and played a significant role in preparation of the Marne reversal, both in pushing Sir John into a more aggressive frame of mind and working out an arrangement with d'Esperey at Bray on September 4 for a combined attack on the Marne. He likewise played a vital role in negotiations leading to the British redeployment in Flanders, but there he promised the French too much, which led to a false expectation. On the other hand, Wilson was much too indiscreet and willing to intrigue, not only for the pursuit of military goals favourable to the French but his own personal advancement. During the "Race to the Sea" and after, his intrigues to take Murray's place as CGS proved unsettling to Sir John and produced much conflict between commands and between Sir John and Kitchener.

Foch, on the other hand, was well known by the British prior to the war, having established good relations with Wilson, Sir John and others. He was able to build on that cordiality to good effect after his appointment on October 4 to coordinate Allied movements on the northern flank. Unfortunately for Allied military relations, however, Joffre had not established personal friendships with either Sir John French or Kitchener prior to the war.

In the absence of a well-defined formula of command relations, doctrinal unity might have resolved some of the difficulties between commands. Part of the problem at Mons on August 22-23, of course, was that Lanrezac, while talking the language of the offensive, actually planned a defensive battle and then left the British in the air on his left. Within the British Command, moreover, Sir John was constantly torn between the overly aggressive attitude of Wilson and the excessively cautious approach of Murray. Moody by nature, he vacillated between extremes of optimism and despair. His decision on August 29 to drop out of the line after his defeat at Le Cateau was, in part at least, the result of a crise de nerfs, while his attacks about Ypres after October 24 were based on excessive optimism. The appointment of the aggressive Robertson in Murray's place at the end of January, 1915, resolved that problem of divided counsels, but by then the repeated French offensives were out of touch with the new conditions of trench warfare. Needless heavy losses were the inevitable result.

Images also played an important role in Allied command relations. Before the war, the French had formed the image of the British as slow, late, and unaggressive in comparison to the alleged élan of the French. The delay in British arrival seemed to confirm the first part of that image; the events of the "Great Retreat," the second. The British, it was believed, would not march unless sustained fully on their flanks by French forces. Strong flank support was thus provided on the Marne and the Aisne. The French Command, moreover, fearing that the British would not march unless fully assembled and sustained on their flank, resisted movement of the BEF from the Aisne to the exposed northern flank. The result was a prolonged crisis. Likewise, in the French plan for 1915, the British were to occupy the secondary theatre north of the Lys more suited to their "defensive" capabilities, and to take over the trenches of the French Eighth Army south of Ypres in order to free French forces for the decisive attacks in Artois and Champagne. The image of the British as unaggressive thus began to play a decisive role in French strategic planning; it would play an even greater role in 1915 and 1916, when the French would press the British to take over more of the trenches to free French forces for the offensive. In the spring of 1917, the issue would come to a head under Nivelle.

In general terms, the operation of the Anglo-French coalition during the phase of movement may be qualified as a limited success. Given the fact that the French and British had been "traditional enemies" and that the defence of France was of immediate vital interest to the French but a matter apparently of secondary concern to the British, with their Imperial possessions to protect, mistrust and suspicions among the two Allies were maintained at a respectable level, perhaps lower than in the Austro-German Alliance.[10] The political leaders of the two countries during the early months of the war demonstrated a remarkable solidarity in the face of a serious challenge from the common enemy. Kitchener, in particular, by his intervention on September 1, held the Alliance together when reverses on the field threatened to tear it apart.

The generals of both nations, largely in response to the failure of French strategy, did less well initially, engaging the enemy in fragmented actions and exchanging mutual recriminations. The Marne, however, proved a turning point. During the Battle of the Marne, on the Aisne, and during the "Race to the Sea," a reasonable level of coordinated action was achieved, despite the persistence of mistrust, suspicions, and almost daily conflict. On the whole, however, the French and British marched better together in 1914 than did the Austro-Hungarians and Germans, who failed to communicate to each other their plans and engaged the enemy in independent actions.[11] With all its failings, the Entente Cordiale thus proved to be as satisfactory an instrument for the preparation of war as the Austro-German Alliance and the French and British at least as compatible as allies as the Germans and Austro-Hungarians, despite common language and years of military cooperation. That, of course, is not to concede very much.

The French and the British had one great advantage in 1914: as former enemies, they at least respected each other. The French, of course, had implicit faith, derived from their assessment of British character, that the British would not desert them, once committed, but see them through to victory. The British, however demeaning their assessment of French personality, respected the French, if for no other reason than "because of their large army."[12] The wartime experience appears to have in part destroyed both those concepts; the British during the war acquired a certain contempt for French arms, especially after the mutinies of 1917, and the French, a greater mistrust of perfidious Albion because of the British penchant for operations in secondary theatres and abandonment of the French at the peace conference in 1919.[13] With the loss of mutual respect, the French and British in 1939 were thus less compatible as former Allies than they had been as former enemies in 1914.

---

[10] See Gerard E. Silberstein, The Troubled Alliance: German-Austrian Relations, 1914-1917 (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1970) and Gordon A. Craig, "The World War I Alliance of the Central Powers in Retrospect: The Military Cohesion of the Alliance," Journal of Modern History, XXXVII (1965), 336-44.

[11] See above references.

---

[12] Foch's statement in 1912, cited on p. 67.

[13] Cf. Cairns, "A Nation of Shopkeepers in Search of a Suitable France: 1919-1940," pp. 711-13ff.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Manuscripts

France

Archives des Affaires Etrangères, Paris

Série "Guerre 1914-1918"
Vol. 534. Grande Bretagne. Dossier Général I. 1914, Août - Décembre.
Vol. 535. Grande Bretagne. Dossier Général II. 1915, Janvier - Mars.
Vol. 979. Opérations Stratégiques Militaires. Dossier Général I. Novembre 1914 - Mars 1915.

Archives de Guerre, Vincennes

16N1903. GQG. 3e Bur. Messages téléphonés et télégrammes reçus de l'Armée Britanniques 8 août 1914 - 16 mars 1915. (12 dossiers.)

16N1905. GQG. EM. 3e Bur. Comptes rendus au ministre du 29 août au 14 octobre 1914.

16N1905. GQG. EM. 3e Bur. Dossier 1. Armée anglaise 19 août 1914 - 20 janvier 1915.

16N1905. GQG. EM. 3e Bur. Ordres et instruction relatifs aux opérations.

16N1675. GQG. EM. 3e Bur. Sorties: Ordres et instructions relatifs aux opérations; dossiers 11-22, 14 septembre 1914 - 5 décembre 1914.

16N1676. GQG. EM. 3e Bur. Sorties: Ordres et instructions relatifs aux opérations; dossiers 23-25, 6 decembre 1914 - 13 janvier 1915.

16N1728. GQG. EM. 3e Bur. Entrées et sorties. Correspondance avec le Ministre de la Guerre, 7 août 1914 - 20 septembre 1914. Sorties: Comptes rendus au Ministre, 22 août 1914 - 16 octobre 1914. Sorties: Renseignements au Ministre, dossiers 1 à 4, 14 octobre 1914 - [illegible].

17N319. Mission Militaire Française près de l'Armée Britannique. Section d'Etat-Major. Entrées et sorties. Concentration et Correspondance échanges par la Section, Août 1914. (2 dossiers.)

17N338. Mission M[ilitai]re F[rançai]se près l'Armée Britannique. Section d'Etat-Major. Entrées et sorties. C Coopération Franco-Britannique. Correspondance secrète entre le GQG et le GHQ, septembre 1914 - decembre 1916. Dossier 1: Coopération Britannique et Interalliée, septembre 1914 - déc[emb]re 1915.

N.B. Many of the documents in the above files were found, by careful comparison, to have been reproduced accurately and entirely in the official French history, *Les Armées Françaises dans la Grande Guerre*. The first 6 files, however, contain a number of sensitive documents not published in *AFGG*. Other files of marginal relevance have not been listed.

Great Britain

Public Record Office, London

Cab 41/35. Cabinet Papers. Letters of Asquith to the King.

Cab 42/1. Cabinet Papers. War Council, 1914.

Private Papers and Diaries

France

General Berthelot Diary. "Souvenirs de la Grande Guerre. Notes extraites de mon Journal de Guerre." I: "Au Grand Quartier Général. La Guerre de Mouvement de la déclaration de guerre au 24 novembre 1914." Unpublished typescript held by the General's nephew, Jean-Claude Dubois, Cressely, St. Rémy-les-Chevreuses, France.

General Buat Papers. 6N7. Archives de Guerre, Vincennes.

Paul Cambon Papers. Archives des Affaires Etrangères, Paris.

Théophile Delcassé Papers. Archives des Affaires Etrangères, Paris.

Ferdinand Foch Papers. Courtesy of Henri Fournier-Foch, 3 square de Ranelagh, Paris XVI^{e}.

Ferdinand Foch Correspondence. 10 October 1914 - 21 January 1916. Archives de Guerre, Vincennes.

Alexandre Millerand Papers. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

Raymond Poincaré Papers. NAF (16027-28). Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

Great Britain

Francis Bertie Papers. WO/800. Public Record Office, London.

Sydney Clive Diaries. II/I. Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives. King's College, London. Courtesy of Brig. A. F. L. Clive, Perrystone, Ross, Herefordshire.

Edward Grey Private Papers. FO/800/55, 55A, 56A. Public Record Office, London.

Horatio Kitchener Papers. 30/59. Public Record Office, London.

Horatio Kitchener Private Office Papers. WO/159. Public Record Office, London.

Henry Wilson Diaries. DS/Misc/80. Imperial War Museum, London. Courtesy of C. J. Wilson, North Winchester.

Government Publications

France. Assemblée Nationale. Chambre des Députés. Session de 1919. *Procès-verbaux de la Commission d'Enquête sur le rôle et la situation de la metallurgie en France. (Défense du Bassin de Briey.)* 2 parties. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1919.

France. Ministère des Affaires Etrangères. Commission pour la publication des documents relatifs aux origines de la guerre 1914-1918. *Documents Diplomatiques Français (1871-1914).* 41 vols. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1929-1959.

Memoirs and Edited Papers

Alexandre, Général R[ené]. *Avec Joffre d'Agadir à Verdun: Souvenirs, 1911-1916.* Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1932.

Asquith, The Earl of Oxford and. *Memories and Reflections, 1852-1927.* 2 vols. London: Cassell & Co., 1928.

Bertie of Thame, Viscount. *The Diary of Lord Bertie of Thame, 1914-1918*. Ed. by Lady Algernon Gordon Lennox. Vol. I. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1924.

Broussilov, Général. *Mémoires du Général Broussilov: Guerre 1914-1918*. Paris: Hachette, 1929.

Cambon, Henri, ed. *Paul Cambon: correspondance 1870-1946*. Vol. III: (1912-1924) *Les Guerres Balkaniques, La Grande Guerre, L'Organisation de la Paix*. Paris: Grasset, 1946.

Charbonnel, Colonel Henry. *De Madagascar à Verdun*. Paris: Karolus, 1962.

Churchill, Winston S. *The World Crisis*. Vol. I: *1911-1914*. London: Thornton Butterworth Limited, 1923.

Danilov, Youri. *La Russie dans la guerre mondiale (1914-1917)*. Translated by Alexandre Kaznakov. Paris: Payot, 1927.

Esher, Viscount Oliver, ed. *Journals and Letters of Reginald Viscount Esher*. Vol. III. London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1938.

Falkenhayn, General Erich von. *General Headquarters 1914-1916 and its Critical Decisions*. London: Hutchinson & Co., 1924. [Translated from German edition which was published in 1919].

Ferry, Abel Jules Edouard. *Carnets secrets, 1914-1918*. Paris: B. Grasset, 1957.

Foch, Maréchal Ferdinand. *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la Guerre de 1914-1918*. 2 vols. Paris: Librairie Plon, 1931.

________. *The Memoirs of Marshal Foch*. Translated by Colonel T. Bentley Mott. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1931.

French, Field Marshal Viscount [John], Earl of Ypres. *1914*. London: Constable and Company, Ltd., 1919.

________. *Some War Diaries, Addresses, and Correspondence of Field-Marshal The Right Honourable The Earl of Ypres*. Edited by Gerald French. London: Herbert Jenkins, 1937.

Gallieni, General [Joseph S.] *Les Carnets de Gallieni*. Published by his son, Gaetan Gallieni. Notes by P.-B. Gheusi. Paris: Albin Michel, Editeur, 1932.

________. *Mémoires du Maréchal Gallieni*. Paris: Payot, 1926.

Gamelin, General M[aurice]. *Manoeuvre et victoire de la Marne.* Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1954.

Grey of Falladon, 1st Viscount Edward. *Twenty-Five Years, 1892-1916.* 2 vols. New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1925.

Haig, Douglas. *The Private Papers of Douglas Haig, 1914-1919.* Edited by Robert Blake. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1952.

Hankey, Sir Maurice P. A. H. *The Supreme Command, 1914-1918.* 2 vols. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1961.

Herbillon, Colonel Emile. *Souvenirs d'un officier de liaison pendant la guerre mondiale: Du général en chef au gouvernement. Vol. I: Sous le commandement du général Joffre.* Paris: Editions Jules Tallandier, 1930.

Huguet, General [Victor Jacques-Marie]. *Britain and the War: A French Indictment.* Translated by H. Cotton Minchin. London: Cassell and Co., 1928.

Joffre, Maréchal [Joseph J.-C.] *Mémoires du Maréchal Joffre, 1910-1917.* 2 vols. Paris: Librairie Plon, 1932.

_______. *The Memoirs of Marshal Joffre.* Translated by Colonel T. Bentley Mott. 2 vols. London: Geoffrey Bles, 1932.

Kluck, Generaloberst Alexander von. *The March on Paris and the Battle of the Marne 1914.* London: Edward Arnold, 1920.

Kuhl, Général [Hermann Joseph] von. *Le grand Etat-Major allemand avant et pendant la guerre mondiale.* Translated from the German. Paris: Payot, 1922.

_______. *The Marne Campaign, 1914.* Translated from the 1920 German edition. Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: The Command and General Staff School Press, 1936.

Lanrezac, Général [Charles]. *Le Plan de campagne français et le premier mois de la guerre (2 août - 3 septembre 1914).* Paris: Payot, 1921.

Lloyd George, David. *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George.* 6 vols. London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1933-36.

Messimy, Adolphe-Marie. *Mes souvenirs.* Paris: Librairie Plon, 1937.

Paléologue, Maurice. *Au Quai d'Orsay à la veille de la Tourmente: Journal 1913-1914 (1^{er} Janvier 1913 - 28 Juin 1914).* Paris: Librairie Plon, 1947.

Pichot-Duclos, Général [R. A.] *Réflexions sur ma vie militaire. Au G. Q. G. de Joffre.* Paris: B. Arthaud, 1947.

Pierrefeu, Jean de. *GQG, secteur I: Trois ans au grand quartier général par le rédacteur du 'communiqué'.* 2 vols. Paris: l'Edition Française Illustrée, 1920.

Poincaré, Raymond. *Au service de la France: Neuf années de souvenirs.* 10 vols. Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1925-1933.

Ribot, Alexandre. *Journal d'Alexandre Ribot et correspondances inédites, 1914-1922.* Paris: Plon, 1936.

Robertson, Field-Marshal Sir William Robert. *Soldiers and Statesmen.* 2 vols. London: Cassell, 1926.

Spears, Major-General Sir Edward Louis. *Liaison, 1914: A Narrative of the Great Retreat.* 2nd ed. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1968 .

Weygand, Maxime. *Mémoires.* Vol. I: *Idéal Vécu.* Paris: Flammarion, 1953.

Secondary Sources

Official Histories

France. Ministère de la Guerre. Etat-Major de l'Armée: Service Historique. *Les Armées Françaises dans la Grande Guerre.* 105 vols. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1923-1939.

Germany. Reichsarchiv und Kriegsgeschichtliche Forschungsanstalt des Heeres. *Der Weltkrieg 1914 bis 1918.* 14 vols. Berlin: E. S. Mittler & sohn, 1925-44.

Great Britain. Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence. *History of the Great War Based on Official Documents.* Compiled by Brigadier General Sir James E. Edmonds et al. [1st Edition except *France and Belgium, 1914*, Vol. I and Maps in 3rd Edition (1933).] 14 vols. London: Macmillan and Co., 1922-47.

Books

Albrecht-Carrié, René. *A Diplomatic History of Europe Since the Congress of Vienna.* New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1958.

________. *The Meaning of the First World War.* Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1965.

Arthur, Sir George. *The Life of Lord Kitchener.* 3 vols. London: Macmillan and Co., 1920.

Barnett, Correlli. *Britain and Her Army, 1509-1970: A military, political and social survey.* London: Allen Lane, 1970.

_______. *The Swordbearers: Studies in Supreme Command in the First World War.* London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1963.

Beaverbrook, Lord. *Politicians and the War, 1914-1916.* Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1928.

Bernard, Henri. *Le Duc de Wellington et la Belgique.* La Renaissance du Livre, 1973.

Bond, Brian. *France and Belgium, 1939-1940.* London: Davis Paynter, 1975.

Bourget, J.-M. *Gouvernement et commandement.* Paris: Payot, 1930.

Bruntz, George G. *Allied Propaganda and the Collapse of the German Empire in 1918.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1938.

Canada. The Historical Section, General Staff. *The Western Front 1914.* Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1957.

Callwell, Major-General Sir C. E. *Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson. His Life and Diaries.* 2 vols. London: Cassell and Co., 1927.

Carrias, Colonel Eugène. *La pensée militaire française.* Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1960.

Cassar, George H. *Kitchener: Architect of Victory.* London: William Kimber, 1977.

Challener, Richard D. *The French Theory of the Nation in Arms, 1866-1939.* New York: Russell and Russell, 1965.

Chastenet, Jacques. *Histoire de la Troisième Republique.* 6 vols. Vol. IV: *Jours inquiets et jours sanglants, 1906-1918.* Paris: Hachette, 1952-1963.

Clark, Alan. *The Donkeys.* London: Hutchinson, 1961.

Clausewitz, Carl von. *On War.* Edited and Translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret with a Commentary by Bernard Brodie. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976.

Collier, Basil. *Brasshat: A Biography of Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson.* London: Secker & Warburg, 1963.

Contamine, Henry. La revanche (1871-1914). Paris: Editions Berger-Levrault, 1957.

_______. La victoire de la Marne, 9 septembre 1914. Paris : Gallimard, 1970.

Corbett, Sir Julian Stafford. Some Principles of Maritime Strategy. London: Longmans, Green, 1938 .

Coveney, Dorothy Kathleen and Medlicott, W. H., eds. The Lion's Tail: An Anthology of Criticism and Abuse. London: Constable, 1971.

Coville, Alfred and Temperley, Harold, eds. Studies in Anglo-French History during the Eighteenth, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935.

Craig, Gordon A. Problems of Coalition Warfare: The Military Alliance Against Napoleon, 1813-1814. Colorado Springs, Colorado: United States Air Force Academy, 1965.

_______. The Politics of the Prussian Army. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1958.

Cruttwell, C. R. M. F. A History of the Great War, 1914-1918. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934.

Desmazes, Général [René]. Joffre: La victoire du caractère. Paris: Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1955.

D'Esme, Jean. Gallieni, destin hors série. Paris: Plon, 1965.

_______. Le Père Joffre. Paris: Editions France-Empire, 1962.

D'Ombrain, Nicholas. War Machinery and High Policy: Defence Administration in Peace Time Britain, 1902-1914. London: Oxford University Press, 1973.

Duffour, Général. Histoire de la Guerre Mondiale. Vol. I: Joffre et la Guerre de Mouvement. Paris: Payot, 1937.

Earle, Edward Mead. Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler. New York: Atheneum, 1967.

Ehrman, John. Cabinet Government and War, 1890-1940. Cambridge, Eng.: University Press, 1958.

Falls, Cyril. The Great War. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1959.

Farrar-Hockley, Anthony. Death of an Army. London: Arthur Baker Limited, 1967.

Feldman, Gerald D. *Army, Industry and Labour in Germany, 1914-1918.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966.

Fergusson, James. *The Curragh Incident.* London: Faber and Faber, 1964.

Fraser, Peter. *Lord Esher: A Political Biography.* London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 1973.

French, Gerald. *The Life of Field-Marshal Sir John French, First Earl of Ypres.* London: Cassell and Co., 1931.

Fischer, Fritz. *Germany's Aims in the First World War.* London: Chatto & Windus, 1967.

Gilbert, Martin, ed. *A Century of Conflict: Essays for A. J. P. Taylor.* London: Hamish Hamilton, 1966.

________. *Winston S. Churchill.* Vol. III: *1914-1916.* London: Heinmann, 1971.

________. *Winston S. Churchill.* Vol. III: *Companion, I: Documents, July 1914 - April 1915.* London: Heinmann, 1972.

Girardet, Raoûl. *La société militaire dans la France contemporaine (1815-1939).* Paris: Librairie Plon, 1953.

Glover, Michael. *Wellington as Military Commander.* London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1968.

Gooch, John. *The Plans of War: The General Staff and British Military Strategy c. 1900-1916.* New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1974.

Gorce, Paul Marie de la. *The French Army: A Military-Political History.* Translated by Kenneth Douglas. New York: George Braziller, 1963.

Görlitz, Walter. *The German General Staff: Its History and Structure 1657-1945.* Translated by Brian Battershaw. London: Hollis & Carter, 1953.

Gottlieb, W[olfram] W[ilhelm]. *Studies in Secret Diplomacy during the First World War.* London: Allen and Unwin, 1957.

Goutard, A. *Six semaines de guerre-éclair.* Vol. I: *La Marne: victoire inexploitée.* Paris: Robert Laffont, 1968.

Greenfield, Kent Roberts. *American Strategy in World War II: A Reconsideration.* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1963.

Guinn, Paul. *British Strategy and Politics, 1914-1918.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965.

Hackett, [J. W.] The Profession of Arms. London: Times Publishing Co., 1963.

Halpern, Paul G. The Mediterranean Naval Situation, 1908-1914. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971.

Hamer, W. S. The British Army: Civil-Military Relations, 1885-1905. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1970.

Hanak, Harry. Great Britain and Austria-Hungary during the First World War: A Study in the Formation of Public Opinion. London: Oxford University Press, 1962.

Hinsley, F. H., ed. British Foreign Policy Under Sir Edward Grey. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Hittle, J. D. The Military Staff: Its History and Development. Revised ed. Harrisburg, Penn.: The Military Service Publishing Co., 1949.

Hodges, Arthur. Lord Kitchener. London: Thornton Butterworth, Ltd., 1936.

Howard, Michael E. Soldiers and Governments: Nine Studies in Civil-Military Relations. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1957.

_______. Studies in War and Peace. London: Temple Smith, 1970.

_______. The Continental Commitment: The Dilemma of British Defence Policy in the Era of the Two World Wars. London: Temple Smith, 1972.

_______, ed. The Theory and Practice of War: Essays Presented to B. H Liddell Hart on his Seventieth Birthday. London: Cassell, 1965 .

_______. War in European History. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976.

_______. Wellingtonian Studies: Essays on the First Duke of Wellington Historians. Aldershot, Harts, Gale & Polden, 1959.

Isselin, Henri. The Battle of the Marne. Translated by Charles Connell. Introduction by John Terraine. London: Elek Books, 1965.

King, Jere Clemens. Generals and Politicians: Conflict between France's High Command, Parliament and Government, 1914-1918. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951.

_______. The First World War. London: Macmillan, 1972.

Kissinger, Henry A. A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh, and the Problems of Peace, 1812-22. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957.

Koeltz, Lieutenant-Colonel L., ed and tr. Documents allemands sur la Bataille de la Marne. Paris: Payot, 1930.

________, Général. La Guerre de 1914-1918: Les opérations militaires. Paris: Editions Sirey, 1966.

Lasswell, Harold D. Propaganda Technique in the World War. London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1927.

Liddell Hart, Basil Henry. A History of the World War, 1914-1918. 2nd ed. London: Faber & Faber, 1934 .

________. Foch: The Man of Orleans. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1933.

________. Reputations Ten Years After. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1928.

________. Strategy: The Indirect Approach. 3rd ed. rev. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1954 .

Liska, George. Nations in Alliance: The Limits of Interdependence. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1962.

Longford, Elizabeth. Wellington. Vol. I: The Years of the Sword. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969.

Lowe, C. J. and Dockrill, M. L. The Mirage of Power. Vol. II: British Foreign Policy, 1914-22. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972.

Lyautey, Pierre. Gallieni. Paris: Gallimard, 1959.

Lyet, Capitaine P. Joffre et Gallieni à la Marne. Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1938.

Magnus, Sir Philip. Kitchener: Portrait of an Imperialist. London: Grey Arrow Editions, 1961.

Marder, Arthur J. From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow: The Royal Navy in the Fischer Era, 1904-1919. 5 vols. London: Oxford University Press, 1961-70.

Mattingly, Garrett. The Armada. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1959.

Maurice, Sir Frederick. Lessons of Allied Co-operation: Naval, Military and Air, 1914-1918. London: Oxford University Press, 1942.

Mayer, Arno J. *Political Origins of the New Diplomacy, 1917-1918.* New York: Howard Fertig, 1969.

Monger, George E. *The End of Isolation: British Foreign Policy, 1900-1907*. London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1963.

Monteilhet, J. *Les institutions militaires de la France, 1814-1932.* Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1932.

Morison, Samuel Eliot. *Strategy and Compromise: A Reappraisal of the Crucial Decisions Confronting the Allies in the Hazardous Years, 1940-1945.* Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1958.

Ralston, David B. *The Army of the Republic: The Place of the Military in the Political Evolution of France, 1871-1914.* Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1967.

Read, James Morgan. *Atrocity Propaganda, 1914-1919.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941.

Recouly, R. *Le Mémorial de Foch. Mes entretiens avec le Maréchal.* Paris: Ed. de France, 1929.

Remak, Joachim. *The Origins of World War I, 1871-1914.* New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1967.

Renouvin, Pierre. *Les formes du gouvernement de guerre.* Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1925.

________. *Peuples et civilisations. Vol. XIX: La crise européenne et la première guerre mondiale (1904-1918).* 5e ed. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1969.

Ritter, Gerhard. *The Schlieffen Plan: Critique of a Myth.* Forward by B. H. Liddell Hart. Translated by Andrew and Eva Wilson. London: O. Wolff, 1958.

________. *The Sword and the Scepter: The Problem of Militarism in Germany. Vol. II: The European Powers and the Wilhelmian Empire, 1890-1914.* Translated by Heinz Norden. Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1970.

Roskill, Captain S. W. *The Strategy of Sea Power: Its Development and Application.* London: Collins, 1962.

Ryan, A. P. *Mutiny at Curragh.* London: Macmillan, 1956.

Silberstein, Gerard E. *The Troubled Alliance: German-Austrian Relations, 1914 to 1917.* Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1970.

Sixsmith, Major-General Eric R. L. British Generalship in the Twentieth Century. London: Arms and Armour Press, 1970.

Smith, C. Jay, Jr. The Russian Struggle for Power, 1914-1917: A Study of Russian Foreign Policy During the First World War. New York: Philosophical Library, 1956.

Spears, Brigadier General E. L. Prelude to Victory. London: J. Cape, 1939.

Stone, Norman. The Eastern Front, 1914-1917. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975.

Tanenbaum, Jan Karl. General Maurice Sarrail, 1856-1929: The French Army and Left-Wing Politics. Chapel Hill, N. C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1974.

Taylor, A. J. P. English History, 1914-1945. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965.

———. Politics in Wartime and Other Essays. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1964.

———. The First World War: An Illustrated History. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1963.

Terraine, John. Mons: The Retreat to Victory. London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1960.

Trask, David F. The United States in the Supreme War Council: American War Aims and Inter-Allied Strategy, 1917-1918. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1961.

Trumpener, Ulrich. Germany and the Ottoman Empire, 1914-1918. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968.

Tuchman, Barbara W. The Guns of August. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1962.

Varillon, Pierre. Joffre. Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1956.

Waites, Neville, ed. Troubled Neighbors: France-British Relations in the Twentieth Century. London: Weidenfeld, 1971.

Wanty, Emile. L'art de la guerre. Vol. II: De la guerre de Crimée à la blitzkrieg hitlérienne. Verviers: Marabout Universite, 1967.

Weber, Eugen. The Nationalist Revival in France, 1905-1914. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968.

Williamson, Samuel R., Jr. *The Politics of Grand Strategy: Britain and France Prepare for War, 1904-1914.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969.

Woodward, Llewellyn. *Great Britain and the War of 1914-1918.* London: Methuen & Co., 1967.

Wright, Gordon. *Raymond Poincaré and the French Presidency.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1942.

Young, Brigadier Peter. *The British Army, 1642-1970.* London: William Kimber, 1967.

Articles

Arnold, Joseph C. "French Tactical Doctrine, 1870-1914." *Military Affairs*, XLII (April 1978), 61-67.

Baumont, Michel. "Abel Ferry et les étapes du contrôle aux armées, 1914-1918." *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, XV (1968), 162-208.

Blake, Robert. "Great Britain: The Crimean to the First World War." *Soldiers and Governments: Nine Studies in Civil-Military Relations.* Edited by Michael Howard. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1957.

Bliss, Tasker H. "The Unified Command." *Foreign Affairs*, I (December 1922), 1-30.

Boulding, Kenneth E. "National Images and International Systems." *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, III (1959), 120-31.

Brisac, Général. "Les polytechniciens de l'Armée d'Afrique." *Revue historique de l'Armée*, II (1954), 19-32.

Cahisa, Raymond. "Le double roman d'amour de Joffre le pyréneen." *Miroir de l'histoire*, VII (1956), 337-42.

Cairns, John C. "Along the Road back to France." *American Historical Review*, LXIV (1959), 583-603.

________. "International Politics and the Military Mind: The Case of the French Republic, 1911-1914." *Journal of Modern History*, XXV (September 1953), 273-85.

________. "A Nation of Shop Keepers in Search of a Suitable France: 1919-1940." *American Historical Review.* LXXIX (1974), 710-43.

Campbell, John P. "Refighting Britain's Great Patriotic War." International Journal [Canada], XXVI (Autumn 1971), 686-705.

Collins. D. N. "The Franco-Russian Alliance and Russian Railways, 1891-1914." The Historical Journal, XVI (1973), 777-88.

Corvisier, André. "Aspects divers de l'histoire militaire." Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine, XX (January - March, 1973), 1-9.

Cossé-Brissac, Général de. "2 Août 1914." Revue historique de l'Armée, XX (1964), 7-10.

Craig, Gordon A. "The World War I Alliance of the Central Powers in Retrospect: The Military Cohesion of the Alliance." Journal of Modern History, XXXVII (1965), 336-44.

D'Esperey, Franchet, Maréchal. "Notes sur la conduite supérieure de la guerre de 1792 à 1797 et de 1914-1918." Revue militaire générale, 2e Série, II (1938), 137-52.

DeWeerd, Harvey A. "Churchill, Lloyd George, Clemenceau: The Emergence of the Civilians." The Makers of Modern Strategy. Edited by Edward Mead Earle. New York: Atheneum, 1967.

Dominique, Pierre. "La tragédie de la Marne." Miroir de l'histoire, LVI (September 1954), 288-98.

________. "Les deux chefs allemand et français en août - septembre 1914." Ecrits de Paris, CCXXIX (1964), 58-65.

Druène, B. "De la guerre de mouvement à la guerre de tranchées." Revue historique de l'Armée, XX (1964), 173-80.

Dutton, D. J. "The Calais Conference of December 1915." Historical Journal, XXI (1978), 143-56.

Flammer, Philip M. "The Schlieffen Plan and Plan XVII: A Short Critique." Military Affairs, XXX (1966), 207-12.

Gibbs, Norman. "British Strategic Doctrine, 1918-1939." The Theory and Practice of War: Essays Presented to Captain B. H. Liddell Hart. Edited by Michael Howard. London: Cassell, 1965.

Hubatsch, W. "Grosses Hauptquartiers 1914/18." Ostdeutsche Wissenchaft-Jahrbuch . . ., V (1959), 422ff.

Irvine, Dallas D. "The French Discovery of Clausewitz and Napoleon." Journal of the American Military Institute, IV (1940), 143-61.

________. "The Origin of Capital Staffs." *The Journal of Modern History*, X (June 1938), 161-79.

Jäschke, Gotthard. "Zum Problem der Marne-Schlacht von 1914." *Historische Zeitschrift*, CXC (1960), 311-48.

Liddell Hart, Basil H. "French Military Ideas before the First World War." *A Century of Conflict: Essays for A. J. P. Taylor*. Edited by Martin Gilbert. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1966.

Liénart, A. "Le sort de Lille en 1914." *Revue du Nord* (Lille), XLVII (1965), 461-86.

Lowe, C. J. "Italy and the Balkans, 1914-1915." *British Foreign Policy under Sir Edward Grey*. Edited by F. H. Hinsley. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Lyet, P. "Joffre, Foch, Maunoury: les trois polytechniciens de la Marne." *Revue historique de l'Armée*, II (1954), 63-78.

________. "La Marne." *Revue historique de l'Armée*, XX (1964), 238-57.

________. "Trois futurs maréchaux de France à Madagascar." *Revue historique de l'Armée*, XIX (1963), 98-117.

Pedroncini, Guy. "Les rapports du gouvernement et du haut commandement en France en 1917." *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, XV (1968), 122-32.

________. "Remarques sur la décision militaire en France pendant la grande guerre." *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, XX (Janvier - Mars 1973), 139-52.

________. "Stratégie et relations internationales: la séance du 9 janvier 1912 du conseil supérieur de la défense nationale." *Revue d'histoire diplomatique*, XCI (1977), 143-58.

Pingaud, Albert. "L'Entente et la conduite de la guerre." *Revue d'histoire de la Guerre Mondiale*, XIII (1935), 224-56.

Possony, Stefan T. and Mantoux, Etienne. "Du Picq and Foch: The French School." *Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler*. Edited by Edward Mead Earle. New York: Atheneum, 1967.

Renouvin, Pierre. "Histoire de la Guerre." *Revue historique*, CLXVII (1931), 344-71.

________. "Le problème du commandement unique." *Revue d'histoire de la Guerre Mondiale*, XI (1933), 339-51.

________. "L'opinion publique et la Guerre en 1917." Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine, XV (1968), 4-22.

________. "The part played in international relations by the conversations between the general staffs on the eve of the World War." Studies in Anglo-French History During the Eighteenth, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. Edited by Alfred Coville and Harold Temperley. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935.

Robbins, K. G. "Foreign Policy, Government Structure and Public Opinion." British Foreign Policy under Sir Edward Grey. Edited by F. H. Hinsley. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Rothfels, H. "Clausewitz." Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler. Edited by Edward Mead Earle. New York: Atheneum, 1967.

Ruby, Edmond. "Souvenirs évoques par un livre militaire récent." Ecrits de Paris, CLXI (1958), 61-68.

Setzen, Joel A. "Background to the Failures of August 1914: Civilian and Military Dimensions." Military Affairs, XLII (April 1978), 87-90.

Singer, J. David and Small, Melvin. "Formal Alliances, 1815-1939." Journal of Peace Research, I (1966).

Stewart, W. A. "Lanrezac, Joffre, and Plan XVII." Military Affairs, XXXII (February, 1969), 181-90.

Towle, P. "The European Balance of Power in 1914." Army Quarterly and Defence Journal, CIV (1974), 333-42.

Trainor, Joseph. "Antwerp, 1914." War Monthly, XLI [1977], 8-17.

Vidal, C. "L'armée Britannique à la Bataille de la Marne." Revue d'histoire de la Guerre Mondiale, XIV (1936), 344-69.

Unpublished Materials

Neilson, Keith E. "Kitchener, Russia and British Strategy, 1914-1915." Unpublished article courtesy of Keith Neilson, Royal Military College of Canada, Kingston, 1979, pp. 1-29.

Prestwich, Patricia Elizabeth. "French Attitudes Toward Britain, 1911-1914." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1973.